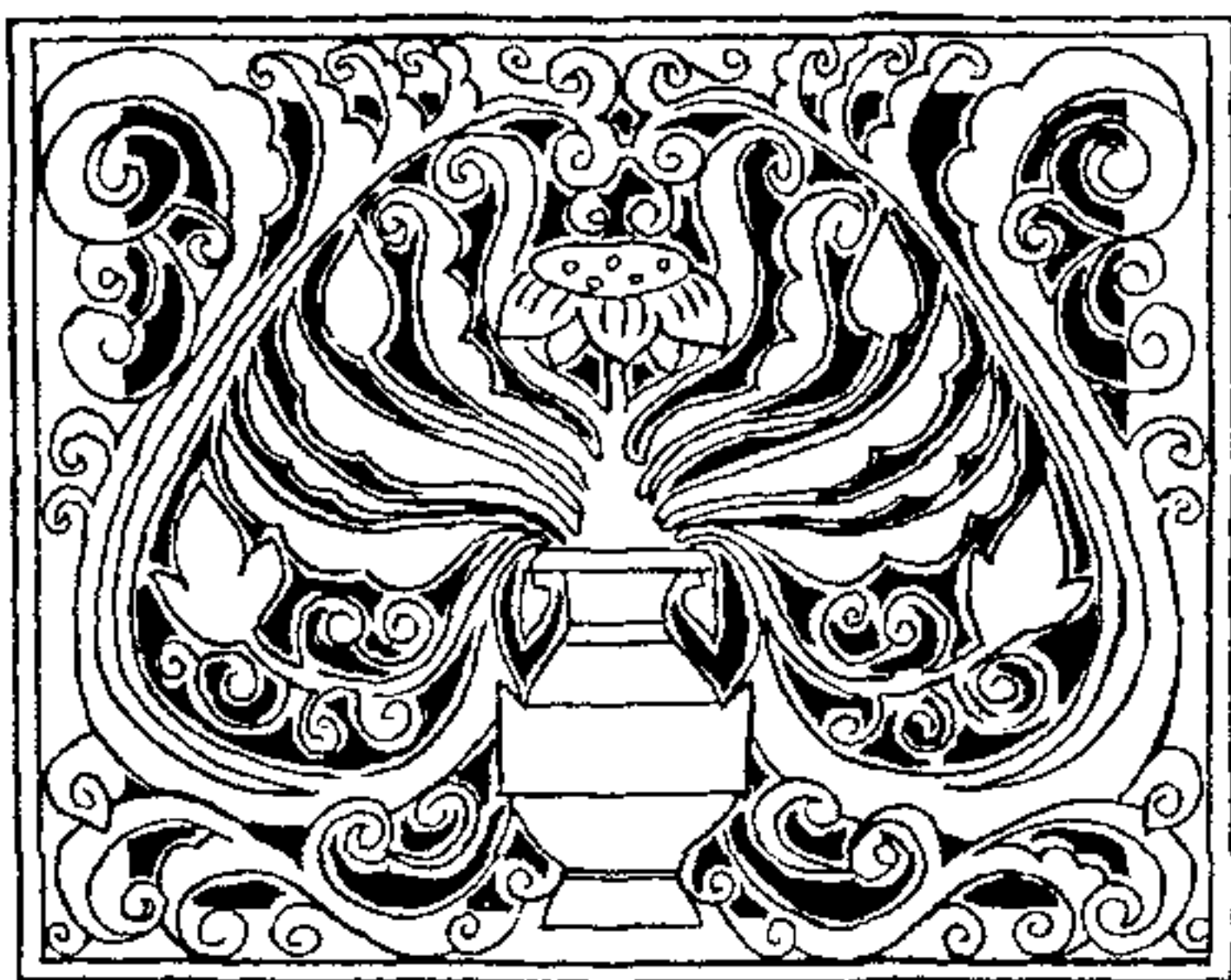




PRABUDDHA BHARATA

A Monthly Journal of the
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started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

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JANUARY 1998

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उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत



PRABUDDHA BHARATA

ARISE! AWAKE! AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED

Vol. 103

JANUARY 1998

No. 1

Divine Wisdom

THE BHAGAVAN AS THE ONE GOAL OF ALL ASPIRANTS

(Sage Kapila to his mother Devahūti)

क्रियया क्रतुभिर्दानैस्तपःस्वाध्यायमर्शनैः।
आत्मेन्द्रियजयेनापि संन्यासेन च कर्मणाम्॥

There are three stages of spiritual growth. The first stage is that of pious householders following the Vedic injunctions. It consists in performance of Vedic rituals and sacrifices, in works of charity, in the study of the scriptures and reflection on their meaning, in practising control of the mind and the senses, and in the discharge of one's duties as an offering to God.

योगेन विविधाङ्गेन भक्तियोगेन चैव हि।
धर्मेणोभयचिह्नेन यः प्रवृत्तिनिवृत्तिमान्॥

The second state is that of those who follow a way of life that combines both *Pravṛtti* (secular life characterized by works) and *Nivṛtti* (exclusively spiritual pursuits).

They follow the specific nine-fold discipline of Bhakti supported by disciplines of work and concentration.

आत्मतत्त्वावबोधेन वैराग्येण दृढेण च।
ईयते भगवानेभिः सगुणो निर्गुणः स्वदृक्॥

The third is that of advanced spiritual aspirants who have intense dispassion for the self-centred life and devote themselves exclusively to the realization of the Atman. It is the Bhagavan, the supreme principle of Self-awareness, who is both *Saguṇa* (in association with the *guṇas* of *Prakṛti*) and *Nirguṇa* (without such association, transcendent) that all these aspirants worship and ultimately reach.

—Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, 3.32.34–6

To Our Readers

The *Prabuddha Bharata* is now entering its 103rd year of publication. On this occasion we take pleasure in wishing our readers, contributors, advertisers and well-wishers a very happy and prosperous new year.

People have various definitions for prosperity. But a journal devoted to spirituality uses the word prosperity with an extended meaning—worldly prosperity, which everyone understands, and spiritual wealth, which every devotee of God strives for. While it is obvious that the desire for worldly prosperity is throbbing in every human heart, and one goes to endless trouble to amass those transitory treasures on earth which one believes will be satisfying, yet there is felt in the human heart a deep discontent even if all the riches are heaped on the head of any one individual. As the *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* correctly says, he is a miser who departs from earth when the curtain falls on his limited life span, without realizing Brahman. He who knows Brahman verily becomes Brahman. That is the goal of human life towards which every man and woman must strive consciously. The realization of one's true original nature endows one with a transformed personality which conduces to personal good and to the welfare of humanity. Bereft of this realization we work with greed towards our selfish pursuits and, behaving like a pack of dogs before which some meat has been thrown, meticulously strive for self-destruction. This is not to be expected from rational men and women. This journal is therefore devoted to the spread of the message of spirituality, to encourage men and women towards the cultivation of every faculty that they possess, and to establish a society of individuals which will be ideal in every respect.

The journal is necessarily grateful to its readers and we hope that they not only continue to stay with us but also increase in number. Needless to say, we invite every reader to work enthusiastically towards sharing the contents of this journal with like-minded friends. We are extremely thankful to our contributors of articles for their well-thought-out contributions and for their waiting patiently for our bringing out their work. We have not sufficient words to express our gratefulness and indebtedness to the reviewers of books for their learned service. To the advertisers we are immensely obliged for their financial support without which it would not have been possible for us to keep the prices low without sacrificing the quality of production.

The year 1998 is special for many reasons. A century ago the Ramakrishna Math at Belur moved into its present campus from where it has been sending out waves of spirituality. To many parched souls, the temples of Sri Ramakrishna, of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, and of Swami Vivekananda are places for solace, and to many earnest devotees, they are places for spiritual uplift and total fulfilment. To quite a few, the Belur Math is replete with many personal memories and associations. In 1898, what is now known as the Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Sister Nivedita Girls' School came into being. Also, the centenary celebrations of the foundation of the Ramakrishna Mission which began in May 1997 will conclude in February 1998.

As in the years gone by, we bring out this special issue in January, and we earnestly hope you like it. □

In Search of Bliss

The blissful winds are sweet to us.
 The seas are showering bliss on us.
 May the corn in our fields bring bliss to us!
 May the plants and herbs bring bliss to us!
 May the cattle give us bliss!
 O Father in Heaven,
 be Thou blissful unto us!
 The very dust of the earth is full of bliss.
 It is all bliss, all bliss, all bliss.¹

Contrary to the common experience that the environment we are living in today is not congenial for human habitation, contrary to the commonly held view that we are constantly being bombarded by other objects and by other minds, the above peace invocation tells us that there is bliss and sweetness all around us. How is it then that we are unable to tap that bliss? Is the above invocation born out of a figment of our fanciful imagination revealing a deep-seated desire that there be bliss and sweetness around when actually it is not so? Or is it that this invocation is intended to make us strive to look at our environment and our own selves in proper perspective so that we can learn to live, walk, work and sleep in bliss? If we can feel this bliss within and without, how may we do that? Can all of us do that or is it for some select fortunate souls? These and many other questions come to our mind.

The *Bhagavad-Gita* mentions in chapter 15 the immutable ashvattha tree with its roots above and the branches spread below. This is not how an ashvattha tree, or any tree for that matter, normally looks. What is

painted in that *sloka* is a subtle truth: the world we perceive is but an inversion of the Real. We know from physics that such an inversion happens during reflection. The suggestion, therefore, is that there is an inversion of the Reality in our world perception, that we see things as other than what they really are.

The ancient sages tell us of Reality as being one without a second, partless, simple, imperishable, constant, immutable, ageless, birthless, deathless; yet what we perceive through our senses is a world of multiplicity, of birth, ageing and death all around, a dissected world of many parts, of changes galore. Are there then two worlds, the one real and the other a reflection? What has happened to us that we perceive things as they are not? What is it that the sages performed to accomplish that as-it-were super-human task of perceiving things in their true light? Are the experiences of the sages at all relevant to us?

Sri Ramakrishna states a few fundamental spiritual truths: (1) God is, (2) God can be seen, (3) I have seen Him, (4) You too can see Him. We must have faith in these four basic truths and proceed with this faith along the path indicated by him to test for ourselves, to verify for ourselves, that we too can have God-vision. We can begin even with a questioning spirit, but with earnestness, and our lives will bear testimony to his findings. The ancient seers too said, 'Hear, ye children of immortal bliss! even ye that reside in higher spheres! I have found the Ancient One who is beyond all darkness, all delusion: knowing Him alone you shall be saved from death over again.' Being children of immortal bliss, we ought to inherit

1. *Life of Swami Vivekananda* by His Eastern and Western Disciples, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1994), vol. 2, p. 356.

immortal bliss even as a child inherits its paternal property.

Swami Vivekananda presents a scientific stand: *if some one has seen God somewhere some day, then it is only scientific to expect that that experience will be repeated, that I too can see God, if only I try.* Secondly, *if anything can be done some day, it can be done today if only we accelerate the speed as by using a catalysis.* What is required is purity, sincerity and longing for the higher Reality. But these qualities are not obtained in a day. Patient and persistent effort is needed.

One may wonder that even after years of spiritual striving we do not appear to have advanced far or at all. What is the problem with us? Those among us who are optimistic may hold that, as the Holy Mother said, a man in his sleep, if removed bodily to another place, does not realize immediately on waking that he has come to a new place. However, the situation for most people has been beautifully illustrated: Some drunk men chose to row an anchored boat one evening, they rowed all night, and early next morning when the effect of inebriation had left them, they realized that they had not budged an inch. We too are driving an anchored boat, as it were. To what are we anchored? To our ego, to name and fame, to home, wife and children, to a hundred other things. We say we are spiritual aspirants. In proof thereof we undergo some spiritual practices, make some pilgrimages, perform some acts of charity, etc. Yet all our efforts do not seem to be getting us anywhere. Rarely do we try to find out if there has been a tangible progress in our spiritual life and, if not, the reason for our failure, and the remedial steps we should take. Most often we settle down to the idea that it will take many lifetimes to progress, that the ancient sages performed many austerities for many lives before they had glimpses even. We hold that, in the social setup in which we find ourselves burdened by a thousand cares and worries, it is only

reasonable that we make slow progress, if at all.

Real longing for God is a far cry until we break the bonds that keep us pressed down. When the bonds are broken down, then we will not be pressed down, we will float, we will have a longing for spiritual practices, we will see proofs of spiritual progress. And these proofs will sustain us, goad us further and increase our momentum. As Sri Ramakrishna said in a parable, a man who digs at a place for a treasure has to put in hard labour, he begins to sweat profusely, he removes just a bit of the hard ground, he digs deeper and deeper, he gets to hear the clang of a metal—possibly the treasure pot—, then he begins to see it. His enthusiasm knows no bounds. He works on with redoubled energy and there, the treasure is in his hands!

Unfortunately, we are so deeply involved with a burdensome world that our religious practices are often prayers to God for fulfilling our many worldly needs. Sri Krishna, in the *Gita*, mentions (VII.16) four types of devotees: the distressed person, the aspirant after knowledge, the seeker of wealth, and the man of knowledge. One engaged in true spiritual practice seeks God and God alone. As Swami Vivekananda said, *'When the world is the end and God the means to attain that end, that is material. When God is the end and the world is only the means to attain that end, spirituality has begun.'*² Thus a man seeking God's favour to remove his distress or to gain worldly possessions is still on the material plane. One who aspires to gain knowledge of God, prays to Him for knowledge, devotion, love of God, discrimination and dispassion. The one who has known God is in communion with Him; his life of constant bliss is a blessing to humanity. In true spiritual practice, we become engaged in apparently worldly activities. The vision, however, is higher and all ac-

2. C.W., vol. 6, p. 66.

tions are performed as a means to gain God-vision. *Where there are selfish desires lurking in the heart, there God does not take His seat; and where God is, there cannot be any worldly desires.* Sri Ramakrishna mentions this in a homely way: The Master of the house does not enter the store-room because there is *already* someone there. Our God is a selfish God; He must have the whole of our heart for Himself; He will not share it with another. Who is the other man in our heart? That other man is the embodied being which says, 'I', 'me', 'mine', the enjoyer, the doer. How to drive out this 'me' and 'mine', which Sri Ramakrishna pointed out constitutes ignorance? Certainly not by merely avoiding these terms in speech, but by knowing that God alone is the doer, that we are merely instruments in His hands or that we are but reflections, images. An image is never real; what is real is the object. If the mirror that reflects an object is broken, the image is broken but not the object. The object is not at all affected whether there is a reflection or not. Likewise, it is God alone who exists; He has placed in us a sense of free will which makes us feel responsible for what we do. But all actions are in reality performed by Him, we are merely instruments in His hands. But this has to be felt and realized.

Spiritual life, therefore, aims at self-abnegation, at eliminating the ego-sense which is so strong within us. The four yogas aim at effacing the ego (though some prefer to hold that each of the yogic practices in themselves preserve the ego in tact because we tend to believe that it is *we* who are the doers), and when this is achieved what remains is the Reality. Whether it be through devotional exercises, or through the performance of selfless work, or the performance of work in the spirit of service, or through scriptural study, reflection and meditation, or through yoga practices aiming at curbing the mental modifications, the goal is the same: to rest in our own selves—*sva-stha*. When we rest in our own

selves then we are said to be healthy, peaceful, calm and a source of solace to others.

Once an elderly monk asked a group of novices the significance of the picture of Sri Ramakrishna depicting him with one hand pointing upward and another held near the heart. Imagination had its full sway and various answers came forth. None of the views seemed satisfactory to the elder. The monk then said that what was significant was *the bliss expressed in the face of Sri Ramakrishna*. Holy Mother, reminiscing about the days when Sri Ramakrishna was in his physical frame, said that she used to feel as if a pitcher of bliss was ever present within her heart. What a blessed state indeed!

The fundamental requisites for spiritual life may be many, but we can safely begin with chastity. No spiritual progress can be expected without practising unbroken chastity. It is the pure mind alone that can comprehend spiritual truths. So, while childhood is the best time to begin spiritual life, it is better late than never. Even before inner tendencies get a grip over the mind, children should be taught how to cultivate respect for ideal lives and lead noble, pure, unselfish lives. There are many who come to spiritual life when they are past adolescence and find that they have an uncontrollable mind to deal with. *That is why a somewhat strict society is more suitable. Where the society is free, the youth find far more problems to deal with when they seriously settle down to spiritual life.*

While discrimination, dispassion, renunciation and scriptural study have a definite value in spiritual life, yet it is necessary to engage oneself in some spiritual practice under the guidance of a guru. When one wishes to learn a difficult subject, one goes to a competent teacher. Likewise to progress spiritually, one must seek the grace of an enlightened guru and, placing oneself under his care and guidance, undergo spiritual practices. It is only the liberated who can grant liberation to the aspiring soul.

If we closely watch our behaviour in our daily life, we will observe that we truly do not depend on God or our spiritual teacher. We have far too many supports to help us stand, that we do not entirely take refuge in God or guru. It is only when we see that all our supports are in reality feeble and give way easily, that we, like the drowning Peter, will call on God. Sri Ramakrishna asks the devotee to call on God with '*a real cry*'. Without the genuine urge, such a call will not issue. When we do give forth such a call, we shall find that God listens to us, that He has always been listening to us and prompting us to call on Him. Do we want God seriously?—that is the question. Sri Ramakrishna tells the story of a would-be-disciple who was kept immersed in a river till he panted for a breath of air. Releasing him, the would-be-guru asked the disciple whether he wanted God *that* badly. If we wanted God and God alone, then every one of our movements will indicate that. The world will not weigh heavily with us. We will not care much to keep our own house in order. Our own bodies will not matter too much. Our mind, not finding any delight in sense objects, will be given wholly to God. We will delight in taking the name of God, we will seek holy company, and we will find pleasure in reading the revealed words of God. Our dependence on God will be total. Anxiety will give place to everlasting bliss.

In *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* we come across an episode in the life of M., the recorder of the *Kathamrita*. It was 26 October 1884, a Sunday.

M. had gone to Dakshineswar to see Sri Ramakrishna, of pleasing countenance, a repository of infinite qualities, whose words are an elixir to parched souls, whose benign glance is sufficient to remove the bonds that bind man to the world, whose mere presence fills the atmosphere with a spiritual rarity that lifts the soul Godward. Many devotees had assembled already by the time M.

reached. It was a day of great joy. The devotees' faces reflected the love for God felt by the ever blissful Sri Ramakrishna. What a wonder! The joy was not rebounding merely from the faces of the devotees; even the garden, the trees laden with leaves, the varieties of flowers that were in bloom, the wide sheet of the incessantly flowing river Ganges, the sun-illuminated blue sky above, the cool breeze that carried drops of the Ganges sanctified by its origin at the feet of Lord Vishnu, all these reflected that bliss. In truth it appeared that the very dust of the earth was full of bliss—even the dust in the garden beamed with bliss. A desire arises, that alone or in the company of devotees I roll on the grounds; or, standing on one side of the garden, I keep looking at the mind-captivating Ganges; or, embrace and utter many sweet words to the bliss laden trees, creepers, flower plants, and the soothing and bright trees decorated with many leaves and flowers.—A desire arises that I keep gazing joyfully imbibing the sight of the dazzling sky. I do see that all the worlds are suffused with bliss.

That is the joy that one gets when one realizes God, when one goes to the proximity of a realized soul, when one visits the places of pilgrimage sanctified by realized souls. Not knowing this, how pitifully man wallows in misery. Swami Brahmananda speaking of the joy of spiritual life says ³: '*My boy, devote yourself to spiritual practices. Attain knowledge and devotion. Then you will see how your heart will overflow with love and sympathy for mankind. You will also find out how unnecessary is man's suffering, since he has a mine of bliss within himself.*' The joy that we experience through the senses will be dwarfed when we experience this spiritual joy. □

3. *Spiritual Teachings of Swami Brahmananda* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1945), p. 70.

Unpublished Letter of Swami Vivekananda

The letter itself is short but the history behind it speaks volumes for the enthusiasm with which Swami Vivekananda and his teachings were received by the people of Madras. V. Nataraja Aiyar, busy at work as the Editor of a weekly and a monthly, worked hard but silently amidst worldly preoccupations and social welfare activities to spread as early as in 1898 the message of the hero of the World's Parliament of Religions in Tamil, the spoken language of the people of Tamil Nadu. Today, a hundred years later, we eagerly look forward to see manifest this enthusiasm in many spheres of social and religious life.

One of the most popular Tamil weeklies during the days of Swami Vivekananda was *Lokopakāri* (Doer of good to the world), managed and edited by V. Nataraja Aiyar, who paid particular attention to his own religious life and engaged himself in many social welfare activities.*

Such being the mindset of V. Nataraja Aiyar, he serialized in *Lokopakāri* translations in Tamil of selected portions of Swami Vivekananda's speeches: Karma Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Chicago Addresses, Religion of Love, Practical Vedanta, etc. He frequently devoted space in the weekly to write about incidents in the life of Sri Ramakrishna, Swamiji and other illustrious personages. It will not be an exaggeration to say that it was V. Nataraja Aiyar who first wrote in Tamil about Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji. The articles that appeared in *Lokopakāri*, he collected and brought out in three parts in the form of a book, *Jnāna Tirattu* (Condensed Wisdom).

The first part of the book contained a beautiful and resplendent picture of Swami Vivekananda in meditation posture and a short biography of Swami Vivekananda of world fame, who spoke abroad in English to enlighten the non-Aryan people on the religious conclusions of the Aryan sages and established the glory and grandeur of the Hindu's religious concepts and realizations. The book included translations of 'The Real and the Apparent Man', 'Hindu Religion', 'Karma Yoga', 'Worship of Pratikas and Pratimas', and other topics covering the four yogas. The first page of the book read, 'Most Respectfully dedicated to His Holiness Swami Vivekananda By V. Nataraja Aiyar'. This book came out on 1 April 1898. Printed on 16 Pound gloss paper of Demy size, the book was well bound and ran into a hundred pages. It was printed at Attison Company, Chennai (Madras). In writing about the book, V. Nataraja Aiyar said that Swami Vivekananda had given to us the ideal medicine called Vedanta through stories, ideal characters and divine examples in a manner suitable to the people of the present age. Expressing that there need be no fear of comprehension of the ideas, V. Nataraja Aiyar wrote that the book contained the truths contained in the *Gita* and the Upanishads fashioned into the form of sweet sugarcandy with many illustrations, thereby encouraging the public, even children, to go through the contents repeatedly with greater and still greater relish.

* Based on the article 'Vijaya Deepam', *Ramakrishna Vijayam*, November 1978. *Ramakrishna Vijayam* is a monthly Tamil magazine of the Ramakrishna Order. We are immensely grateful to Swami Prabhanandaji Maharaj, a Trustee of the Ramakrishna Math, for sending a copy of the article which appeared in *Ramakrishna Vijayam* for sharing it with the readers of *Prabuddha Bharata*.

V. Nataraja Aiyar sent a copy of the book each to Swami Ramakrishnananda and Swami Vivekananda. The response of Swamiji in English together with its translation into Tamil was published in the second part of *Jnāna Tiraṭṭu*, which came out three years later.

Ballen Villa,
Darjeeling,
15th April, 1898

Dear Sir,

I have much pleasure to acknowledge your letter of the 7th instant together with a copy of a free rendering in lucid Tamil of some of my lectures. Indeed you have done a great service to the Tamil speaking people generally and to your anxious subscribers specially. It is no doubt very desirable that there be a broadcast spreading of all that I have said amongst the people, and the best mode of doing it is to render it in all the vernaculars of the country and you are to be congratulated for taking the lead in right earnest.

Wishing you all success in your venture and blessing you,

I remain yours truly
Vivekananda

The express desire of Swamiji 'that there be a broadcast spreading of all that I have said amongst the people, and the best mode of doing it is to render it in all the vernaculars of the country' came to be fulfilled

in his birth centenary year (1963) through the efforts of the Ramakrishna Mission. However, the undisputed credit for first bringing out the teachings of Swamiji in Indian vernacular (in Tamil) goes to V. Nataraja Aiyar as stated by Sri P.S. Mani in his excellent research paper, 'The Stature and Growth of the Indian Nation' (in Tamil). The second edition of the first part came out three years later and had two pictures of Swamiji in it.

The second part of the book included Bhakti Yoga and parts of Jnana Yoga as well as a short biography and a beautiful picture of Swamiji. V. Nataraja Aiyar attributed the delay of three years in bringing out this part to his worldly preoccupations. It was expected by him with a measure of certainty that Jnana Yoga in complete would be brought out in the third part in a year's time.

It may be added that V. Nataraja Aiyar was simultaneously the Editor of the monthly Tamil magazine, *Jnānacandrikā*. Wielding a facile pen, V. Nataraja Aiyar brought out both *Lokopakāri* and *Jnānacandrikā* on similar patterns—dealing with many aspects of religious and social life—and they bore the stamp of the sages of the great religion of India, especially religious harmony. In time, V. Nataraja Aiyar brought out a book, *Jnānadarśini*, containing his own articles dealing with spiritual truths, Pauranic stories and the lives of great religious men and women. □

The Self is within, and the Self is without; the Self is before and the Self is behind; the Self is in the south, and the Self is in the north; the Self likewise is above and also below.

As the wave, the foam, the whirlpool, the bubble, etc. are all in essence but water, similarly the *Cit* (Knowledge Absolute) is all this, from the body up to egoism. Everything is verily the *Cit*, homogeneous and pure.

—Vivekacūḍāmaṇi, śloka 389–90

Vedantic View of Evolution*

SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA

Both the East and the West believe that humanity has been evolving through the ages to attain a state of perfection. The East believes that this state of perfection is attained when one realizes one's real nature as Brahman. As to how this state is attained there are, broadly speaking, two methods—the method of jñāna and the method of bhakti. Revered Maharaj, in a Sunday lecture delivered at the Vedanta Society, Providence, several years ago, discusses the two methods basing his discussion on the Upanishads and the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam and points out that 'combining jñāna and bhakti is far better than a one-sided effort in the evolution of man.'

About the primordial background stuff of this universe, we have a word in Sanskrit: Brahman, the Absolute, the Infinite, of the nature of pure existence and pure consciousness. The whole world has come from Brahman: It exists in Brahman and it goes back to Brahman. This is the meaning of evolution in the Vedantic context. In the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* (III.i.1), there is a verse which expounds this idea: *Yato vā imāni bhūtāni jāyante...tad brahmeti*—That from which the universe proceeds, That in which—even in the present state—it abides, That unto which it returns in the end, That is Brahman; try to know It. This is a profound utterance in the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad*. Brahman is not only Existence but is also pure Consciousness and Bliss.

The hymn that you recited at the commencement of this meeting is a very beautiful exposition of this idea of the ultimate Reality in man and nature: *Jo kuch hai so tū hū hai*....That is what the first line says: Whatever exists in this world, it is all Thou, it is all Thou. And the composer of that song, Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Moghul Em-

peror in India, has also said in it: 'Wherever I look, I see nothing but You, the whole universe is Thyself.' Here you have that supreme vision of unity behind the diversity of this universe. This song's special significance is that Swami Vivekananda, as Narendran, used to sing it to Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna used to appreciate it immensely. The whole universe is God Himself. It is a remarkable vision, and people in the West must remember that (Vedanta) and modern science accept a unity behind multiplicity of this universe. There is no duality behind the universe. Everything is God Himself.

Creation, according to Vedanta, is not creation; it is manifestation, projection. *Sṛṣṭi* is the word in Sanskrit; *Sṛṣṭi* means projection—the many coming out of the One. That is evolution. And, as we see in the modern biological context, this evolution has a particular order: First we have the background material. And cosmology and astronomy tell us today that it exploded and became this universe, from which all the starry systems, solar system, earth, and life came. This is how the universe began. There was a primordial explosion, and the universe expanded. After some millions of years there will be an implosion—this is a new term in astronomy—for a return journey to the

* We are grateful to Swami Atmaramanandaji Maharaj for sending us the script of the talk after due editing for publication in *Prabuddha Bharata*.

original stage. From the One the many came; and the many goes back to the One in the end. This is strictly Vedantic, Advaitic vision—non-duality, as we call it. In Nuclear Physics we say: from quantum field energy came quantum particles, and these particles became what you call those molecular structures found in the world. But the particles are nothing but the field energy itself. The field alone is true—the other things are only temporary manifestations of that field. This is the language of Einstein.

So, in Vedanta, from Brahman we come, in Brahman we rest, and to Brahman we return. It is just like a wave rising from the sea, which after some time returns to the sea. It was water, it is water, it becomes water. Another example Vedanta takes is that of a seed. In it all the possibilities of the future tree are present. If you look at the seed, you won't see any tree or flower or leaf or branch or fruit in it. This little seed, however, contains all the future possibilities of the tree. Similarly, the background material, called Brahman in Vedanta, contains all the possibilities of the future developments; it is the Infinite appearing in you as the Self, the one Self in all of us, the one Self in the universe.

The concept of God in Vedanta has two dimensions—transcendental (attributeless), and immanent (personal): Shiva and Shakti, Brahman and Shakti. Brahman and Shakti are one, they are not two. That is why the concept of evolution in Vedanta is a basis for higher spiritual life and spiritual realization; unlike in the West, where the concept of evolution was considered to be the death-knell of religion. Christian Theology was afraid of evolution; they tried without success to choke it; but, in India, evolution is central to spiritual and philosophical thinking. We are all the products of evolution. This evolution has taken two stages so far: one is cosmic, the other is organic. We have

come at the end of this organic evolution. Nature has given us this beautiful organism—body-mind complex, with an ego centred within the complex.

Now Vedanta tells us to study evolution—as to how it has come to be what we have today. In man alone there is knowledge of evolution; animals have no knowledge of evolution, they are only events in evolution; they don't know what this evolution is. But in man evolution becomes self-conscious, self-aware—this is the language of modern biology. In man alone evolution gets the possibility of his directing that evolution hereafter—take on Nature, direct it. It was a blind evolution going on—now you can do it with your own hands and carry it on to higher levels. It is here that Vedanta has placed a profound question before modern man: What is the nature of that evolution from now onwards? When I speak of evolution from this point of view, I bring in the subject of religion.

Vedanta understood religion as that profound science and technique of mass evolution from creatureliness to blessedness. That is the purpose of evolution at the human stage. Nature has brought us to this level at which we are partly creatures and partly free. In many respects we are like creatures. What is their nature? Any organism that is shaped by forces outside of itself is a creature. Man is a creature in several respects, but man is also free. He is a combination of freedom and necessity. If he can utilize this properly, manipulate the situation properly, he can carry evolution to higher and higher levels. What is the nature of those higher levels? That is the field of religion. Religion begins from this point. From this organic system we are going to develop new values. This is the beauty of Vedanta, that it takes whatever is given by the scientific view of evolution, as it itself developed it ages ago. That is why it has

welcomed the scientific view of evolution. But it adds something of its own to the scientific view. It says that there is something profoundly hidden in all of us which is the infinite Brahman, from which the universe has come. We must manifest It, we must realize It. That is our true nature, and Nature has given us the organic capacity to realize this truth. No animal body can realize this truth—only this human organism can help us to realize this truth.

That absolute reality of Brahman is behind this universe and it is there in front of us also; we are in between, and we have to rediscover that Brahman, our own source, as also the source of the whole universe. Professor Capra of Berkeley University, in his book, *Tao of Physics*, quotes a beautiful passage from the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* (4.10.4) which says: *Prāṇo vai brahma, kam brahma, kham brahma*: Brahman is energy, *prāṇa* is energy—both physical and bio-energy, including psychic and spiritual energy. Brahman is energy, *prāṇo vai brahma*. What kind of energy? *Kam brahma*—calmness, happiness, bliss. That makes it a living energy, not a dead energy. It is endowed with consciousness. It is *kham brahma*—*kha* means space, infinite. Brahman is therefore consciousness; not mere consciousness but energy-consciousness, not merely energy-consciousness but infinite also. What a beautiful conception of the background material of this universe, which not only creates the physical sciences but also becomes the basis of the science of spirituality. For God is sought in religion, God who is pure consciousness, who is a person and who is also impersonal. In *jñāna* we see God as impersonal, in *bhakti* we see God as personal; and personal, impersonal are the same—two aspects of one Reality—as you say in physical language: energy that is bottled up is matter and energy that is released is radiation; bottled-up, released—the same substance in two dimensions.

So energy, silent and quiescent, is Shiva, energy manifest is Shakti. The whole universe is a play of Shakti. Shakti stands for the personal aspect of the impersonal, says Sri Ramakrishna.

In our spiritual life we take our evolution to higher levels. Now the ego is centred in the organic system; the organic system seeks only organic pleasure and satisfaction. We discipline our life at this level and take that energy to a higher dimension—this is called evolution at the human stage. Ethical, aesthetic and spiritual levels of human development are what religion gives us as the great objective of evolution at the human state. On gaining these, then, great things will happen within this body. We can realize infinite joy, infinite bliss, infinite knowledge.

This human organism has all these capacities. Why do we revere Buddha? He had enlightenment. The word *buddhi* means enlightenment and *buddha* means one who is enlightened. All the great spiritual teachers were enlightened people. They were also human like us, but within this human system they discovered something profound. They took life to a very high level and they beckoned us also to come to our own destiny. What was obtained by Buddha can be obtained by everyone—that is what Buddha said. So here is evolution taking a new course at the human level. No animal body can do this. It is, as I said, triggered by nature's forces. Only in the case of man, this higher nature within us takes over the lower nature and moulds it for its own development. That is why body and mind can be moulded by man himself so that he can become an instrument for manifesting that divine light within him.

Brahman from whom the universe came is within the universe, but the universe does not know it. Still, the universe as devel-

oped in man can know it, can realize it. The sun cannot know Brahman nor can the organic systems; but the human system can know Brahman. That is the wonderful uniqueness presented by Vedanta about man. When man takes this upon himself, he achieves a tremendous breakthrough in evolution, rediscovering the source from which we all came. That is the purpose of human life, says Vedanta: to realize God, hidden in all beings, unknown to us. There is a famous passage in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. There are two great women in this Upaniṣad—one is Maitreyi, the other is Gargi—a philosopher, a famous debater, a free spiritual seeker. The conversation between Yajnavalkya and Maitreyi on the one side, and Yajnavalkya and Gargi on the other forms one of the greatest passages in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (III.vii.3–15): *Yah prthivyām tiṣṭhan prthivyā antarah...yah sarveṣu bhūteṣu tiṣṭhan sarvebhyo bhūtebhyo-ntarah* — what exists in all beings, what all beings do not know, what remaining within manipulates all beings, that is Brahman, that is the Self, that is our true nature. This has to be realized within and above this body-mind complex. We must make this body-mind complex fit for that realization.

That is the challenge before us, so that this evolution which has brought us to this high level of human intelligence, human understanding, does not stagnate at this organic level. Let it be given a higher and higher direction. That is our responsibility, and one has to do it for himself or for herself. So far as animals are concerned, nature was the midwife; so far as man is concerned, we don't need this midwife, we can do it ourselves. This growth and development, and the realization of the profoundest truth of God in experience can be achieved by us by manipulating this wonderful environment provided by the body-mind complex. That is the great laboratory experiment of religion. Just as we need a laboratory to experi-

ment in physics, for religion here is a wonderful laboratory—this body-mind itself. If you can make it suitable for that experiment, you have done the greatest thing for yourself.

That is why Vedanta asks us to look forward, and carry this energy onward. Look back to study evolution, but that is only to make you take the next step. You are evolving, you are growing, you are expanding in your awareness, you are breaking the barriers that are there, which nature has placed before you. In fact, this very body we feel sometimes is a barrier; mind is a barrier, sense organs are barriers. For man these are all barriers. You have to break the bondages and expand. For example: Love only yourself, my body will tell me; I say, no, I will love others, I will love other bodies also. I will break through this prison of the body. Though I live in the body, I will not make it my prison or my tomb. Most people do it—those who are self-centred and selfish, they make the body the tomb of their own soul. You go to a prison, you are imprisoned there; no freedom to come and go; that is called a prison. Don't make the body a prison. You are free when you live in a house, and go freely out and in. That is called a home. The difference between a home and a prison is that you are free to come and go in a home, but you are not free to come and go in a prison. The body should not be made a prison. It is a beautiful home, in which you can live and conduct your affairs. Don't get stuck up in the body, go beyond it.

That spiritual expansion is what is called religion. You expand spiritually. Physically you are limited, mentally you are limited, spiritually you are unlimited. I may be living in a corner of the earth, absolutely in a corner, called the body, but my mind won't be a captive there—it can cover the whole world, the whole of existence. That is evolution, expansion, development,

growth. That is a beautiful idea. When you read the *Life of Ramakrishna* by Romain Rolland, there is a beautiful sentence there, an assessment of Sri Ramakrishna's greatness. He says: 'Though Ramakrishna's external life was set in a limited frame, in a tiny village in Bengal, far away from the political currents and cross-currents of the world, his inner life embraced all the multiplicity of men and gods.' Physically speaking, we live in a place with a particular latitude and longitude. But why live only at that level, even mentally? Can't we expand spiritually with our sympathy, our love, our compassion, enveloping the whole world? Yes. And these are the examples: a Jesus, a Buddha, a Sri Ramakrishna, limited externally, unlimited inwardly. Their hearts and minds embraced all the multiplicity of men and gods.

That is the aim of religion: how to take man from the limited to the unlimited, infinite, universal existence itself. How to carry him from creaturely dependence to the blessedness of freedom? We have developed two methods—we call them *jñāna* and *bhakti*. *Jñāna* is through negation, and *bhakti* is through affirmation. Affirm this evolution as it is, affirm this body; affirm all this and proceed with that affirmative idea higher and higher. That is *bhakti* development, and Ramakrishna recommends it to all. The other is *jñāna*, rather difficult, but equally valid, and a remarkable distance apart.

Now there are two passages in the Vedantic tradition which describe evolution from the present stage of man to the highest level—in the language of *jñāna* and in the language of *bhakti*.

The *jñāna* language you get in the Upanishads. That very *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, at the end of the seventh chapter (7.26.2), in three lines compasses the whole of human evolution, from this creatureliness and finiteness to blessedness and freedom. I am just

referring to that passage in Sanskrit and giving you the translation: *Āhāra-śuddhau sattva-śuddhiḥ, sattva-śuddhau...bhagavān-sanat-kumārah*. The story there is: A student by the name Narada goes to a teacher by the name Sanatkumara, who had realized the infinite Atman. He says: 'Sir, please teach me. I know words, I have studied books, I have scholarship, but I am not happy. I know that I can be fulfilled and happy only when I realize God.'

The whole of the seventh chapter is the response of Sanatkumara to this entreaty from Narada, to carry him from the finite to the infinite, from creatureliness to freedom. And when you read modern literature, you find the exact duplicate of this chapter in some of the utterances of modern thinkers. I always refer to Bertrand Russell, a very acute thinker—agnostic and fearless. In his book, *The Impact of Science on Society*, he says: 'Today we have plenty of knowledge, and along with it plenty of sorrow, tension, unfulfilment. Unless man increases in wisdom as much as in knowledge, the increase of knowledge shall be an increase of sorrow.' The more knowledge, the more sorrow. Knowledge must be raised to wisdom.

But what is wisdom? Sanatkumara takes Narada from knowledge to wisdom and, towards the end of the chapter, utters these words: *Āhāra-śuddhau sattva-śuddhiḥ*—when whatever you take in from the world as impressions are purified, the mind becomes purified. What is mind? The product of all these impressions. So take care of these impressions, just as when you eat food. When you take dirty food from the bazar, your body becomes unhealthy. Take care that you take only clean, pure food. This we don't apply to the mind. We must apply this to the body and the mind. Whatever you take in will affect your body and mind. Let us be careful, let us see that only what is clean and good is taken.

We speak of pollution—atmospheric pollution, water pollution, so many types of pollution—but the worst pollution today is the pollution of mind. Mind is polluted all the time. The world is simply sending waves and waves of pollution to the mind. So the Upanishad exhorts us to purify whatever we take in from the world into the mind. When this is properly attended to, the mind becomes pure, just as the body and the blood become pure if only clean food is taken into the body. Care for both must be taken, but mental food is more important than even physical food.

This is, however, not an end in itself. There are higher things to achieve—*sattva-śuddhau dhruvā smṛtiḥ*. When the mind is pure, something great happens to man. The memory of his free divine nature becomes constant in him. Generally, it comes like a glimpse and goes away. It does not stay, because the mind, for want of purification, cannot retain that vision. When the mind is pure, the knowledge remains constant, irrespective of our status in life. The last line, *smṛtir-lambhe sarvagranthīnām vipramokṣaḥ*, refers to the next stage as the result of this achievement. When this memory becomes constant, all the bonds are burst, all bondages break, you become free, here in this very body—not in some heaven. So these are the three lines giving us in a nut-shell the entire course of human evolution from the present state of helplessness, dependence and creatureliness to the highest level of freedom and bliss and fulfilment.

That is how the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* gives us a picture of human destiny—very high destiny—and that destiny is freedom. Freedom is the beginning of man, freedom is the end of man. The universe begins in freedom, the universe ends up in freedom. That is the Vedantic teaching. That Brahman who freely became this universe—nobody compelled Him—Brahman evolved into the

universe, as though in play, in a spontaneous action. And now we try to realize that freedom, finally, once again. After all these wonderful evolutionary experiences, Nature returns to Brahman through you and me. This is the Vedantic vision of evolution from the human stage in the light of the great philosophy of *jñāna*.

Bhakti has a similar message, with different fundamentals but the same end. In *bhakti* you practise various spiritual disciplines. Meditation is a discipline in *bhakti* also. In Mahayana *bhakti*, there is repetition of God's name, with a rosary or without. Along with japa, or repetition of God's name, there is meditation, reading of holy books and singing of *bhajans*. All these constitute the spectrum of spiritual practices in the path of *bhakti*. In addition, there is the need for association with good people, devotees, holy people, *sat saṅga*—as we call it. In the light of this *bhakti*, how man attains to the consummation of evolution is a beautiful exposition that you get in that great book, *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*. There is a remarkable passage which I will share with you. You recite the name of God, repeat Krishna, Jesus, Shiva or Rama. What is happening to you when you do it? The first verse (I.2.17) of this passage says: *Śṛṇvatām svakathām kṛṣṇaḥ puṇya-śravaṇa-kīrtanaḥ / hr̥dyantaḥstho hi-abhadraṇi vidhunoti*, which means that the Lord enters into your heart and slowly washes away all that is impure or dirty. Why? *Suhṛt-satām*, because he is the friend of all good and struggling people. As we are attached to Him, He is also attached to us. This is also a profound mystical theme in Christianity. As we are seeking God, He also is seeking us.

In one mystical tradition the concept of God seeking man is beautifully emphasized. That idea is put into poetry by a famous British poet, Thompson, in the book, *The Hound of Heaven*. God is like a hound seeking

out a prey, and you are the prey. He goes on hunting, and until he catches you, He won't stop. So the 'hound of heaven' is a beautiful expression. As we seek Him, He also seeks us.

The next steps are now mentioned (I.2.18). *Naṣṭa prāyeṣu-abhadreṣu nityam bhāgavata-sevayā / bhagavati-uttama-śloke bhaktir-bhavati naiṣṭhikī*. When these impurities of the heart are slowly being washed away, when a good deal of it has been washed away, some profound transformation takes place in you. *Naṣṭa prāyeṣu*—when all that is sin and evil in the heart is almost gone, *nityam bhāgavata-sevayā*, by the constant practice of *bhakti* to the Lord, you develop real, steady, unwavering *bhakti* towards that infinite, divine personality, God. This is a great state of devotion. Normally our *bhakti* is not like that. It is by fits and starts—now it is here, then it goes away. When anything goes wrong, we think of God; when everything is okay, we forget Him. A child cries when it is in trouble, and it wants its mother. Otherwise it forgets its mother, though the mother is always concerned about it.

So God is always concerned about us, but our *bhakti* to God is not steady in the earlier stages. We say in our language, and in English also we have that saying: man's calamities, God's opportunity. In India we say, whenever you are in sorrow, you remember God; otherwise you don't remember. So, when this development occurs, when the mind becomes pure and mature, it becomes steady. And Śrī Ramakrishna gives the example of the compass needle which always points to the North—you move it, but it will turn to the North. That is its nature. The human mind becomes constantly steady in the direction of God. *Bhaktiḥ bhavati naiṣṭhikī*. Emotion, suffering, sorrow cannot shake it. In the Old Testament, and in many books of Hindu tradition also, examples are given where in spite of many troubles com-

ing upon a man, his love of God remained constant.

There is the story in the *Mahabharata* of Yudhishtira, the eldest of the Pandava brothers. They suffered a lot in life. For fourteen years they were in the forest. They lost their children. Their wife, Draupadi, was kidnapped once. But Yudhishtira always spoke of righteousness, of God, love of God, and never in any other language. One day, even his wife became very much embarrassed by his constantly speaking of righteousness and justice and devotion and *dharma*. She asked, 'What has God done to you? What has *dharma*, or righteousness, done to you?' She was angry with him, but he was absolutely unmoved. He said, 'What can I do? It is my nature to love *dharma*, it is my nature to love God, I love all that is righteous and good and pure. That is my nature. I don't get anything from them. I don't expect anything from them. I love good for good's sake, not for anything else.' Then he said, 'Look at these beautiful Himalayas, majestic. I love them, I love what is majestic and grand, I get nothing from it, it is my nature to love what is majestic and grand.' The story of Job in the Bible is similar. In spite of all the troubles and sufferings, he stuck to his original devotion.

So here you have a very highly developed stage of evolution, where the mind is steady, always pointing to the highest ideals, and nothing able to shake it from there.

Then the next height of evolution is mentioned. For climbing Mount Everest, you go from one hill to another until you reach the top. All evolution is like that, going higher, higher, higher. So he says: *tadā rajastamo-bhāvāḥ kāma-lobhādayaśca ye / ceta etair-anāviddham sthitam sattve prasīdati*. There a tremendous revolution takes place in your inner life. What is that? *Tadā*, then, *rajastamo-bhāvāḥ kāma-lobhādayaśca ye*. This hu-

man mind, which is so much subject to *rajas* and *tamas*, passionate and inertial aspects of nature, remains unsmitten by such evil forces as lust, anger and greed. *Sthitam*, it becomes steady. In what? *Sattve prasīdati*, it shines in tranquillity, calmness. When water is absolutely pure, we can see a coin drop to the bottom. If it is muddy, we can't see. The mind also becomes pure, steady and translucent. This is the very highest state which every devotee is trying to achieve.

The next part of the *śloka* is, *evam prasanna-manaso bhagavad-bhakti-yogataḥ / bhagavad-tattva-vijñānam mukta-saṅgasya jāyate*. Such a person who has achieved that pure *sattva* in his mind, understands what God is. He experiences what God is; Here and now, completely free from all attachments, he becomes free in every sense of the term. When he loves somebody, it is not because he is bound to do so—he does so spontaneously, naturally, as an outpouring of his own infinite heart. That is what Jesus had, Buddha had—infinite love, infinite compassion. The more we give, the more is there. That is the only time when we are not beggars. So this *śloka* says: You achieve that fullness, you realize God, you understand what spirituality is. Then what happens?

In answer comes the last verse. *Bhidyate hṛdaya-granthiḥ-chidyante sarva-saṁśayāḥ / kṣīyante cāśya karmāṇi dr̥ṣṭa-eva-ātmani-īśvare*. It is an adaptation of a famous verse of the Upanishads, in the *bhakti* language. When this God enters into your heart, what happens to you? *Bhidyate hṛdaya-granthiḥ*: All the knots and complexes of the heart are broken asunder. *Chidyante sarva-saṁśayāḥ*: All the doubts and confusions are completely eliminated. *Kṣīyante cāśya karmāṇi*: All those conditioning actions which I did in the past, which conditioned me now, are eliminated. When? *Dr̥ṣṭa-eva-ātmani-īśvare*: When the infinite, divine personality is realized in yourself, these tremendous results come to you.

Here you have the goal of human evolution: from creatureliness to freedom, from wretchedness to blessedness. Here, in this very body, in this very life. This body and mind become a wonderful laboratory for this tremendous development. That is evolution at the human level. It is organic evolution, because humans already have the best organs. Now we are to utilize them so that they take us to freedom, to fulfilment.

That is the language of modern biology, as also the language of Vedanta. Fulfilment is the aim, says biology; not organic satisfaction. Quality is the criterion says biology, not quantity. Vedanta says the same thing and takes us step by step to that highest level. Evolution finding its consummation in absolute freedom. God rediscovers Himself in man, for He cannot rediscover Himself in any other thing. In the sun, in the stars, in the creatures, He could not discover Himself. But in this man here, He has rediscovered Himself.

In this remarkable project of evolution, which is the science of religion, called Vedanta, we have the continuation of the previous cosmic and organic evolution. The only difference is that all the previous evolutions took millions and millions of years, and so much of wasteful methods of Nature, often almost blindly. But here you take it in your hands; the higher nature in you gives you the guidance and you accelerate it. What took millions of years will take only just this life if we know how to do it properly. Suppose I don't do, even then Nature will certainly take us back to God again, but at her own leisurely pace. If 5000 million years were taken up to this, it may take another 5000 million years to go back to the ultimate state. But why have we to wait that much? Don't we do it faster as with plants and animals? We make plants grow quicker by modern technology; we also make animals give us milk much more quickly through

modern methods.

So Vivekananda asked this question: Can't you shorten time by intensifying your speed? You do have the intelligence to do it. Here, you can do it in this way. That is how Vedanta views this remarkable concept of evolution. Evolution from the finite to the infinite, from bondage to freedom, from death to immortality—and this, in this very body, not in a post-mortem condition. Just imagine the transformation if the people of the world understood this truth and directed their steps in that direction, utilizing life's opportunities and struggles to intensify this evolution step by step. If we but took one step in that direction we would have a healthy society and much of the crime would be banished from that society.

That is another blessing that comes from intensifying either *jñāna* or *bhakti*. But as Ramakrishna would say, combining *jñāna* and *bhakti* is far better than a one-sided effort in the evolution of man. Our Upanishads are always interested in taking man gently along to this higher and higher development, without condemning his earlier phases. As children we have done wrong, as ignorant people we have done wrong. Still, let there be no condemnation. For, it is through mistakes that we go higher and higher. That is why Vivekananda said in

Chicago, according to Vedanta 'man is not travelling from error to truth, but from truth to truth, from lower to higher truth.' There is no concept of guilt in Vedanta—I have done wrong; yes, I have done wrong, I was ignorant. I am better now, I will not do wrong hereafter. There is no sense of guilt, no sense of sin—none of this is there. It is a refreshing attitude, and Vedanta lands each one of us on that shore of illumination, of freedom, of infinite expansion of consciousness. Man is limited to the body in the beginning, but infinite expansion takes place later on. When our being starts stirring, we start our evolution in that higher direction.

This is what Vedanta does: it makes individuals move in the direction of the universal. Whatever steps you take, whatever path you take, it is perfectly valid. There is nothing stereotyped, nothing standard in this. Each man can take his own path, his own way to the highest development. In the matter of spiritual development, each one is unique—as we say of fingerprints, each one has a unique fingerprint. So the path you take is your own, you have absolute freedom to do so. But we say: march on, don't stay put, don't be stagnant. So the one clarion call is, as Swami Vivekananda translated freely from the Upanishads, 'Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached.' □

Merely keeping the company of the holy is not enough. You must open your heart and ask them to solve your doubts. You must carefully observe their lives and imitate their example. It is a lazy man's attitude to think that all one needs to do is to associate with the holy. Needless to say, association is very important, for, in their company, doubts are removed and pure thoughts awakened. Neither scriptures nor books can create as pure impressions nor transform a man's life as much as contact with an enlightened soul.

—Swami Brahmananda, *Precepts for Perfection*, pp. 63–4.

The Evolution of Worship in Hinduism through Idols and Its Advantages

SWAMI MUKHYANANDA

The learned author, a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order, in this well-thought-out article discusses the concept of worship in Hinduism through idols and its evolution through its long history. The author points out that 'the Supreme Spiritual Infinite (Brahman) was conceived, for facility of adoration and worship of people at different stages of development and with varied aptitudes and tastes, in various philosophico-mythical divine forms as a connecting link between the inner Spiritual Reality in Man (Atman) and the Infinite Spiritual Reality (Brahman) behind the universe to enable people to realize their unity or union (Yoga) with that Reality in their own way.' The many advantages one has in supplicating the supreme Being through images are highlighted in this article.

Introduction

The Vedic seers and sages, with deep insight and comprehensive outlook, sought to discover the Ultimate Reality behind all the ever-changing variegated phenomenal manifestation called the 'Universe', with its living beings endowed with consciousness and intelligence, so that human life and activities in the world could be conducted meaningfully in the context of that background Reality which permeates and informs all existence. They arrived at 'That One Supreme Reality' (*Tad-Ekam*) through different stages of enquiry, open discussions, and deep inward concentration and meditation. They designated IT as 'Brahman' (the Spiritual Infinite) and declared that IT is of the nature of Absolute Existence-Consciousness-Bliss (*Ananta Sat-Cit-Ānanda*). IT is Universal Consciousness (*Prajñānam Brahma*) which is noumenally trans-personal, and yet on the phenomenal plane gives rise to and informs all entities and beings as their Inner-Self (*Pratyak-Ātman*), endowing them with empirical individuality and functional reality. Hence for the Vedic seers the manifested universe was not a mere meaningless isolated independently existing material phe-

nomena of disparate objects and beings, but an inter-connected vibrant living spiritual reality subsuming all entities and-beings, whether appearing phenomenally as inanimate or animate, as non-human, human, or divine, or as material or spiritual.

In religious life, therefore, the Supreme Spiritual Infinite (Brahman) was conceived, for facility of adoration and worship of people at different stages of development and with varied aptitudes and tastes, in various philosophico-mythical divine forms, as a connecting link between the inner Spiritual Reality in Man (Atman) and the Infinite Spiritual Reality (Brahman) behind the universe to enable people to realize their unity or union (*Yoga*) with that Reality in their own way. Of course, there were also methods of impersonal approach to realize their identity with the Supreme Reality directly. But that was a very difficult path which only a few could traverse—like climbing up to the top of a steep and high mountain directly. The vast majority seek to realize the Highest Truth by the easy, gradual, zigzag course. The Supreme Reality, the source of all phenomena, being Universal Consciousness, IT

can certainly reach out to them according to their approach as stated in the *Gītā* (IV.11)—‘In whatever manner people resort to Me, in that very manner I respond to them; in every way people follow My path only’ (*Ye yathā mām prapadyante tām tathaiva bhajāmyaham; Mama vartma-anuvartante manuṣyāḥ pārtha sarvaśaḥ*).

But even the mythical divinities are somewhat far away and abstract. Ordinary people cannot grasp their philosophical significance nor can they feel intimate with them and are overwhelmed by their supernatural forms and far away heavenly abodes. They can easily understand if the Divine comes to them in their own midst and lives a human life participating in their earthly activities, in their joys and sorrows. Hence the necessity of Divine Incarnation on the earth who will play-act (*Līlā*) as a human being facing all the circumstances of life.

The religious instinct in Man needs a Divine Incarnation, or His human presence in one way or other. Whether really the Divine incarnates is a moot question and cannot be rationally settled, though nothing is impossible for That which is the source of the universal phenomena and all its entities and beings. It is a matter of faith and the vast majority need it in one form or another. It is also immaterial to rationally establish the fact of Divine Incarnation so long as the concept is religiously fruitful and helps to take man to his Ultimate Spiritual Goal. In Christianity the mystical Christ is more important and central to religious life than the historical Jesus. Similar is the case with regard to other Divine Incarnations and religious Prophets.

The Incarnations etc. too with time get far removed from the mind and the current circumstances. Hence arises the need for concrete physical symbols, which will always remain with us, to feel the vivid pres-

ence of invisible Deities and Incarnations etc., in the form of images, portraits, etc.

Human life is full of artificial things which are highly serviceful. Our language and script are artificial; but they help us to communicate and store knowledge in books. An aeroplane, or a car, a musical instrument, and many other wonderful gadgets are all artificial; but they all serve their purpose. A bamboo ladder, a very simple device, helps us to climb up to the roof. Since there is an Infinite Supreme Reality pervading all, and if the means devised helps us to realize IT, it is immaterial if the means are artificial.

1. Evolution of External Worship

In Hinduism, the spiritual quest has proceeded on three lines:

1. The search for the Supreme Divine Reality, externally and internally, through philosophical enquiry and meditation (*Jñāna* and *Dhyāna*);
2. Through external sacrificial rituals and dedicated work (*Karma*); and
3. Devotion to personalized Divinity (*Bhakti*), through external symbolic worship through images, holy pilgrimages, etc., repetition of the Divine Name (*Japa*), and chanting of hymns and devotional songs, etc. (*Saṅkīrtan*).

1. In the Vedas and the Upanishads, we find the first aspect predominantly. Beginning with the *Nāsadiya Sūkta* in the *R̥g-Veda* (X. 129), the quest grows through several stages culminating in the Upanishads—the Vedānta, where the identity of Atman and Brahman is established.

2. From the Vedic Age (from about 8000 BC) to the emergence of the Buddhistic period (about 500 BC), the expression of external worship was predominantly through sacrifices in Fire

(*Agni*) in Sacrificial Altars (*Homa-Kuṇḍa-s*) through *Yajña-s* and *Yāga-s*. The ritual was based on the conception of the unity and uniformity of the structure of the Macrocosm (the Universe) and the Microcosm (the individual) in all respects, namely:

- a) Brahman, the Infinite Spiritual Reality in the Universal Being, the totality of all,—as the Self (Atman) within all individual entities and beings;
- b) The Cosmic *Devatā-s*¹ (luminous invisible and formless Deities and Divinities), which control the Universe from within,—expressing as the mind and potencies of the senses within, which guide the individual and convey knowledge;

1. The Vedas do not teach an extra-cosmic personal God who creates the universe out of nothing. They hold that the universe is beginningless and endless and is eternal, going in cycles. It arises and manifests spontaneously from an Infinite Supreme Being (*Puruṣa*) as a part of 'His' glory. 'He' is all that is—animate and inanimate. The universe is a cosmos, and there is an inviolable innate Cosmic Order (*Rtam Brhat*), which is determined by the *Dharma* (Inner Constitution and Properties) of all animate and inanimate entities, and is regulated by the Law of Karma (the Law of Action and Corresponding Appropriate Result) at all levels, from the physical to the spiritual, and from human to godly.

The great Cosmic Powers that control and regulate the different aspects of the Cosmic Universe are called *Devatās* (Divinities). They are the Powers of the Supreme Being, but manifest through all natural entities and beings, just as the powers of the mind and senses manifest through our body. They have knowledge and consciousness, just like the mind within us. They are called *Devatās*, from the root *div* = to shine. By resorting to them through worship, one can reach the Supreme Being and life's Goal.

and,

- c) The physical body of the individual as part of the external physical universe.

The Macrocosm and the Microcosm are like the tree and the seed—the seed which is a part of the tree contains the potency of the whole tree.²

Just as when we give food and drink to the body through the mouth, the whole body, senses, and mind are nourished; when we manure and water the tree at the roots, the whole tree is nourished, similarly when we offer oblations through the medium of the Fire (*Agni*), who is one of the *Devatā-s* and the Mouth of the Universal Being, as it were, and is the Carrier of Oblations (*Vahni*) by reducing everything to a subtle state, it reaches all parts of the universe and to the Cosmic Deities therein. Oblations can be offered to the specially invoked Deities too, just as some types of diet specially nourish particular parts of the body and mind.

2. Emergence of Image-Worship and Its Nature

This type of ritualistic worship (*Yajña*—from the root *yaj* = to worship) went on predominantly till the Buddhistic times, side by side with the philosophical enquiry on the nature of the universe and Man, meditation on the Supreme Truth or Ultimate Reality behind the universe, and the chanting of Vedic hymns and prayers to the Deities. Generally the Deities, like the mind, had qualities and power but not form.

2. See this author's book on *OM, Gāyatrī, and Sandhyā* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math) for a detailed exposition on the unity of the Macrocosm and the Microcosm.

See also this author's article on 'The Concept of Yajna in Hindu Life and Thought' in the *Vivekananda Kendra Patrika* (Kanyakumari: Vivekananda Kendra, Half-yearly issue—August 1991).

Then in the Buddhistic tradition, the *Yajña-s* and *Yāga-s* (in which animals were sacrificed) are ignored and, along with the philosophical enquiry and meditational practices, worship of the Buddha and the Deities comes into vogue as a substitute for *Yajña-s* and *Yāga-s*. At first the Buddha is represented by a Tree (*Bodhi Tree*), and then the images of Buddha in meditation and other postures come into being; followed by those of the Deities; and temples are constructed to house the images.

As a result of the Buddhistic upsurge, in the Vedic tradition also the *Yajña-s* and *Yāga-s* were gradually relegated to a secondary place, though they have continued to the present times in some measure and are performed occasionally for rain, public welfare, and world peace. In the post-Buddhistic Purāṇic tradition, we have the various highly venerated mythological Deities based on philosophical and cosmological conceptions—especially those of Siva, Viṣṇu, Gaṇapati, Sūrya, and Kumāra. Their images were all endowed with symbolic forms and represented in different aspects of their cosmic roles and functions and mythological events and incidents. The images were wonderfully sculptured, and gorgeous and artistic temples were built to house them in large numbers all over the country in different architectural styles to counter the aesthetic and negativistic ideas and influence of Buddhistic teaching.

Along with these in due course came the worship of the different Incarnations of Viṣṇu, especially of Sri Rāma and Sri Kṛṣṇa, in images, as also of those closely associated with them in their divine mission on earth such as the great and heroic devotee Hanumān. Then the practice of worshipping in images gradually proliferated to various minor deities, and great and holy persons and saints, just as Buddha and Mahāvīra and others were worshipped in the Buddhistic

and Jaina traditions, such as the Ālvārs, Nāyanmārs, Ācārya Śaṅkara and others in the Vedic tradition.³ In recent times the image of Sri Ramakrishna is worshipped all over India and abroad.

Again, following the famous teaching of the Vedas—‘The Reality is One; sages describe IT in different ways (according to their vision)’ (*Ekam sat; viprā bahudhā vadanti*)—, though the Deities were conceived in different ways, the principle of worship was the same, because, with different names and forms, they were all thought of as representing the same Supreme Divine Reality in ITs different aspects and attributes, and there was no conflict in worshipping one or the other Deity or several Deities at the same time or at different times.⁴ In the *Gītā* also, in the chapter on *Vibhūti-Yoga*, the Lord points out that ‘all manifestations wherever there is more special splendour or excellence (*Vibhūti*) arise from Him only as a part of His glory’. Any Deity, therefore, could be chosen for worship and contemplation according to one’s aptitude and temperament. The Deity thus chosen was called his ‘*Iṣṭa-Devatā*’, the ‘Chosen-Deity’. Hymns and songs were also composed in large

3. The *Yoga-Sūtras* of Patanjali (c. 150 BC or much earlier) advocates for spiritual meditation:- A perfected holy Being (*Īśvara*), the sound-symbol OM, an Effulgent Light, the ‘Pure Heart’ of a saint, or any other entity or being which appeals to our mind—such as the forms of holy entities or persons, or divine forms, etc. (*Yathā abhimata dhyāna*) for success in mental concentration. (see ch. I. sutras 23 to 27, 36 to 39).

4. This can be illustrated by the patent fact that in different dramatic plays and films the same actor may appear with different names and forms and in different roles, male or female, and the story in each case is also different. But the actor whom we admire remains the same.

numbers describing the Supreme spiritual nature of the Deity and the unity and oneness of all the Deities with different names and forms.

The principle of worship was that one is transformed according to the ideas and attributes of the Deity one contemplates (*Yat dhyāyati, tat bhavati*), and gets results according to one's faith and mental attitude (*Yādṛśī bhāvanā yasya, siddhir-bhavati tādṛśī*). So the different spiritual ideas and ideals were superimposed on the different Deities represented by appropriate images in which the ideas and ideals were incorporated in giving form to them. Śiva, representing Renunciation, was used by the *Jñāni-s* and *Yogi-s*, seeking Supreme Knowledge; Viṣṇu, representing Divine Beauty, was used by *Bhakta-s* seeking Supreme Divine Love (*Prema*); Devī, representing the Divine Power (*Śakti*) and Loving Motherhood of the Divine, was used by those seeking pure Filial Devotion and Protection; and so on—all in the context of the realization of the Supreme Reality. It was therefore really 'Ideal-worship' through Idols.

It may be noted that the worship through idols or images did not arise in India from a primitive stage, but after a vast stretch of several thousand years. During this period great and profound philosophies enquiring into the nature of Ultimate Reality and rationalistic cosmological formulations had arisen. In some of the Vedic as well as in the Jaina and Buddhistic traditions a Creator God was not even accepted, though all accepted Spiritual Freedom and Perfection (*Mukti, Nirvāṇa*, etc.) as the goal of life. The *Law of Karma* (As you sow, so you reap) and transmigration and rebirth (*Samsāra* and *Punarjanma*) held sway. Heaven and hell had only a regulative role as an inducement to moral life and good works to purify the mind to help in spiritual life. The real nature of Man as a spiritual being and the goal of

life as the realization of one's infinite spiritual nature had been enquired into and well established. Hence, naturally, the worship through idols was dovetailed into spiritual practices as one of the auxiliary means for realizing the highest spiritual ideals, and it was not crude ignorant idolatry. Images were but symbols to evoke the spiritual frame of mind by keeping before the mind vividly the ideals which they were meant to represent, just as a photograph or a graph brings to mind clearly what they stand for. As such in the conception of the form of the images, the philosophical, cosmological, and the spiritual ideas were incorporated—for example, as in those of *Naṭarāja* (the Dance of Creation); in *Raṅganātha* (lying on Causal Waters dreaming out Creation); *Kālī* (Time personified, dancing the dance of Creation on the bosom of Śiva, representing Eternity); and so on in the case of the other Deities as well.

In the Buddhistic period, when *Yajña-s* and *Yāga-s* were replaced, it was found advantageous to make use of images as symbols for meditation and worship, being impressed by the serene figure of the Buddha during his meditation which was inspiring. Hence most of the Buddha images are in the meditative posture with a serene visage. Since worship through images had its own great practical and psychological advantages in spiritual life, a philosophy of image-worship was elaborated and the procedure of worship laid down in detail so that the worshipper advanced from the gross to the subtler aspects, from the material to the spiritual aspects, and from the external to the internal aspects of the Divine Reality. The science and principles of building temples and making images and their consecration was also developed in great detail to serve the purpose of spiritual life. Many works were written on architecture and sculpture (*Sthāpatya* and *Śilpa Śāstra-s*). Not only the images, even the temples were de-

signed to represent spiritual and yogic ideas and the structure of the different *Cakra-s* and *Kośa-s* (Spiritual Centres and 'the Inward Layers of Personality) in Man. The Deity in the Sanctum (*Garbha-grha*) symbolized the Divinity within one's spiritual 'heart'. The *Gopura-s* (Temple Towers) in several tiers represented different world-planes as well as the planes of Consciousness realized in meditation.

3. *Pratīka-s and Pratimā-s*

There was already a way of mental contemplation in the Vedic times when physical symbols were used for meditation (*Upāsana*) on Brahman, the Supreme Infinite Transpersonal Spiritual Reality. The infinite formless Space (*Ākāśa*) and the luminous Sun (*Sūrya*) were used as symbols of Brahman for they exhibited or reminded one of some of the characteristics of Brahman—such as all-pervasiveness, indivisibility and indestructibility, beginninglessness, freedom from all human attributes, etc. in the case of *Ākāśa*; and removal of darkness (of Spiritual Ignorance), the light of Truth, source of all life and activities of beings, and equality towards all beings and entities (in giving heat and light) irrespective of whether animate or inanimate, human or sub-human, rich or poor, ugly or beautiful, male or female, and such other divisive considerations, in the case of *Sūrya*.

These naturally existing symbols were called *Pratīka-s*—that which stands as a visual representative symbol of the original Reality. The idols made of wood, stone, metals or other materials in a concrete manner as symbols to represent the Deities etc. as mentioned before, for purposes of ritualistic worship, were called *Pratimā*, as distinct from *Pratīka*. While *Pratīka-s* are naturally existing symbols with aspects characteristic of the original Spiritual Reality, *Pratimā-s* are as per human conceptions giving concrete form to some philosophico-mythical ideas

evolved in the mind of the sages after prayerful concentration. Since they are used in worship, they are also called *Arcā* or *Arcā-Vigraha* (the image used in worship). The conception of the Deity and its characteristics in the mind are superimposed on the image for purposes of contemplation and worship as a visual help. This is called *Samipad-Upāsana*.

Some special images are also considered as those in which the divine presence is naturally manifested or incarnated to facilitate the worship of the Deity by the devotees, since the incarnations in human form are no more in visible form on the earth. Divinity is so graceful towards the devotees, that through such spiritual incarnation in an image, where the Divine presence is more vividly felt by the faithful, worship is made easy for all.⁵ Such incarnations in images are called *Arcā-avatāra* (incarnation through an Image), even as the Divine incarnates through a living human body.

4. *The Procedure for Image-Worship*

When an image is installed for worship in a temple etc., there are elaborate preliminary rituals for its consecration. Vedic chants and prayers are made for the invocation and sanctification to enliven the presence of the Divine in the image (*Prāṇa-pratiṣṭhā*) for worship. The worship is offered to the contemplated Deity in the consecrated image and not to the image, though it is done in and through the symbol of the image. When we put a garland on the neck of a person or salute his feet, we honour the person expressing through the body, and not the neck, or the feet, or even the body. In ordinary life when we salute the national

5. The images of *Kāśhī-Vishvanāth*, Tirupati *Bālāji*, and others are of this type. Even their sight and touch (*Darśana*, *Sparśana*) are considered efficacious. In other religions we find such instances.

flag, fight and die to keep up its honour, we are not doing it for a piece of cloth with some markings, but for the honour of the country or nation which it represents. Similarly, images of the Deity, though humanly conceived, are for representing the invisible Divinity for rendering worship. In all religions certain places of pilgrimage, relics, crosses, crescents, and verbal symbols are considered holy because of their association with Divinity or spiritual ideas and not in themselves.

That the images are used only as symbols of Divinity for worship is palpably clear in the case of occasional special worship through images. After the ritualistic worship is over in the consecrated image, the Divine presence invoked in it is ritualistically withdrawn, and the image, often a very costly and beautiful one, is consigned to the waters in rivers etc., as is seen in the case of *Durgā-Pūjā*, *Kālī-Pūjā*, *Gaṇeśa-Pūjā*, etc.

There are elaborate symbolic procedures for the worship through the images to feel the Divine presence. The worshipper invokes the Deity from within his 'Heart', and superimposes on a Flower, or the *Śālagrāma-śilā* (a special small un-iconic holy oval stone-symbol of Viṣṇu), or *Śiva-liṅga* (a small un-iconic holy oval stone-symbol of Śiva), or a *Pūrṇa-Kumbha* (a pitcher fully filled with water, to represent the Infinite Divinity), and makes the worship in and through them and not directly on the image, though certain services like decorating with flowers etc., offering of sandal paste etc., waving of lights, food-offerings etc. are also directly offered through the consecrated image. After the worship, the worshipper withdraws the Deity from the Flower etc. into his own spiritual 'Heart'.

Apart from the external worship of the Deity, during the worship there is mental worship (*Mānasa-Pūjā*) within, with eyes

closed, and, also *Japa* (repetition of Divine Name), and *Dhyāna* (meditation), as well as chanting of hymns and Vedic *Mantra-s*, and songs, etc., culminating in Peace-Invocation for the welfare of humanity and other living beings. Sometimes, on special occasions, *Homa* (Fire-Sacrifice of a simple kind) is also done in the name of the Deity.

5. The Advantages of Image-Worship

There are great practical and psychological advantages in worshipping through the images, such as:

1) The image vividly brings to mind the presence of the Divine and there is first of all established in thought a communion between the Deity within one's own person and the Deity expressing through the image outside. A feeling of closeness and intimacy with the Deity arises in the mind. Then one can take recourse to mental worship closing one's eyes, and concentrate the mind on the Divine.

2) Through the concrete symbol, the Sanctum where the image is installed, and the precincts of the holy temple one can offer different types of physical (such as cleaning, culling flowers, preparing the offerings, etc.), mental, and spiritual services, incidental to the worship of the Deity, which help to keep his body, senses, and mind engaged in activity with the thought of the presence of the Deity inspiring his mind. This helps to purify the mind and discipline it, keeping out all idle and useless thoughts and harmful activities.⁶

3) Since the image remains passive in its place constantly, only reminding the worshipper of the Divine, the wor-

6. In *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1994), on 24 May 1884, Sri Ramakrishna tells some devotees: 'Worship Shiva. This worship is described in a

shipper can conduct his worship for a long time. In private worship, he can conduct the worship in whatever way he wants. If there is any deficiency or defect and the service is not done in the proper manner with devotion, the sincere devotee's mind reacts and he is led to correct the defect by himself as the feeling of the Divine presence goads him from within, though the image remains passive without approving or disapproving whatever is done. The attitude of devotion helps the mind to correct itself. The image remains silent, but initiates changes in the devotee's mind by its very presence. This is not possible when we have to serve a Deity, present in person, or a saint or a king. They will not sit there in one posture unmoving without showing any reaction allowing us to do whatever we want, though the purpose is to serve them. If there are any defects or unpleasant things, they will immediately react; they will not remain there all the time also. As we find in the Bible, Koran, and other scriptures, even God gets wrathful if the devotee makes any false step and pours forth His anger. But the image remains serenely in its place all the twenty-

four hours, and allows the devotee complete freedom, without any comments, to worship in the manner he likes and to transform himself from within through psychological reaction. It is the devotee who does all the things. When the mind is purified and focussed and is in a proper attitude, the Divine presence is manifested and is experienced in his own being vividly.

4) We may compare the image to a target fixed for practising shooting or archery. The target remains passively in its place constantly. But the person discharges his arrows to hit the Bull's Eye. It helps him to show how wide off the mark are his arrows and he gradually, with practice, corrects his aim and finally becomes a perfect archer. Similarly, the devotee with the help of the image infused with Divine presence corrects his moods and attitudes and becomes perfect. The devotee's well-trained and purified mind when directed to the Divine finds union with it, like the arrow with the Bull's Eye. (*Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*, II.ii.3, 4.) It is a very simple method and open to all, provided there is faith and sincerity. This advantage is not there in other methods of spiritual practice.

book called the *Nityakarma*. Learn the rituals from it. In order to perform the worship of God you will be preoccupied for a long time with such religious duties as plucking flowers, making sandal-paste, polishing the utensils of worship, and arranging offerings. As you perform these duties your mind will naturally be directed to God. You will get rid of meanness, anger, jealousy, and so forth.

In modern times Sri Ramakrishna achieved the highest spiritual realizations through the worship of the image of Kālī with the utmost ecstatic devotion. He stands as an illustrious example of the efficacy of worship of the Divine through images to the whole of mankind in modern times, since his profound realizations are admired all over the world. □

Concentrating the clean mind on Me, the Brahman beyond attributes, one attains to supreme Bliss, which is the culmination of all pleasures. Concentrating the mind on Me, the pure embodiment of virtue and the Lord of Shvetadvipa, a man becomes pure and beyond the sixfold wave (hunger, thirst, grief, delusion, decay and death).

—*The Last Message of Shri Krishna*, chapter X, ślokas 17–8.

The Journey Within

PRAVRAJIKA VIVEKAPRANA

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Through actions, feelings and sensations, a human being weaves a literal maze of relationships between him or herself as experiencer and the world of experience. Vedanta claims that the experiencer and what is experienced are one and the same and that the conception that we are separated into millions and millions of individual experiencers and variegated objects of experience is the basis of our suffering. We strive for unity, it claims, we want to attain to immortality, we wish to reach a state of rest, but in our effort for achieving this, we have engaged ourselves in all kinds of complicated activities. We must integrate the whole of human energy—physical, mental and emotional—so that all our energy reaches a level of incisive alertness at every plane of our functioning.

This is what we are struggling to attain: a level of inner awakening or illumination which will take us beyond the maze of semi-darkness in which we wander. This semi-darkness of the human mind only works against us by creating myriad forms and shapes, activities and experiences, each leaving a mark on the human soul.

We are awake, we are aware that there is a world surrounding us, we are aware that there are objects, and they are all separate from each other. Through our five sense organs—the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue and the skin—we receive five kinds of sensations. What occurs is that we com-

plicate the matter by combining and re-combining these sensations infinitely, just as we combine and re-combine basic colours to find an infinite number of shades in between. The human mind has a tremendous power of creativity at all levels.

The creation of multiplicity begins by our taking the first move, outside into the world. We note the response of the universe. Believing that we evoked it, the response flatters us. We then become entangled in an interaction which takes on complicated shapes and forms, with feelings and relationships, pleasant or unpleasant. The more we search outside, the more we forget that we are the player, the experiencer, and that it is we who take the first step.

This forgetting is what is called ignorance in Vedanta. Play at the level of duality and multiplicity cannot go on unless the blindfold of forgetfulness is put on. We put on the blindfold of the senses and see the same reality as endowed with shape, form, colour, relationships—and we love it. We love to play with this world of our own experience. As long as we relate the inanimate world, the situation seems simple; it is separate and we do not feel the deep interaction with the physical universe, we can keep it away from ourselves. The moment we try to play with human beings, who seem to be our own extension, we are apt to run into difficulty. If there is no response from them, there is no problem if the response is

not desired, they are also like objects. If a response is desired but not received, we become concerned. However, when they respond, we are either very fascinated or horribly threatened. We then react.

Reaction leads to more feeling, more action. There is also action and reaction from the other person(s). Before we know what is happening, we are caught in a whirlpool of action-reaction pair and do not understand how to get out of it. It is then that we begin the search.

There were ancient sages in India who said that the search for unity, for immortality, had to be made within, that searching outside had only made experience more and more baffling and sorrowful. Only within, they said, is there peace and rest. These words 'search within' are very popular today but they must be understood properly. We will not be able to solve anything if the definition of the words themselves are not clear to us.

To understand this 'within' we might ask, "What is 'without'? Is it really possible to get out of the universe? If the universe is one, and every scientist today tells us that it is united at some level, can there be 'without'? Is there any search possible 'without'? Conversely, is there any search which is possible 'within'?"

A classical example of the search without is an Einstein or any pure scientist who searches for a truth necessarily connected with the outside, physical, world. We are sure that when we talk about the physical world, we are talking about an 'external' reality, but what is it external to? To the body? To the sense organs? To the awareness? External to the understanding? It is only when we do not go deeply enough into the implications of the words that we make these divisions 'within' and 'without'.

We experience the world. Ordinary people find nothing very mysterious about it. We take it for granted that when the eyes are open, there are colours and shapes, there is light, all manner of things. We use these things to make ordinary life interesting. Beyond that, we do not really bother whether there are secrets buried in the heart of physical experience.

There are some, however, who have delved deeply and find that even physical experience is not apparent, but is full of secrets. Einstein looked at the physical nature of the universe and found that previous theories did not explain everything. What did he do? He looked at those theories once again, looked at the facts of physical experience once again—and he thought, and he thought, and he thought about it. He did not go out and 'touch' physical matter. He sat in his study and used his own laboratory, the inward laboratory of the mind, at the level of understanding. There he came to a deeper understanding.

Does such understanding belong to the physical world or does it belong to the experiencer? If understanding belongs to ourselves, then all discoveries, whether at the physical or at the mental level, are made within, they are not without. They *seem* to refer to something which is without, they *seem* to refer to suggestions being brought in by the sense organs, but the sense organs belong to the experiencer, within. This being the case, we are led to ask, 'Is it the sense organ that really explains the matter, that really discovers the truth? Or is there something behind the sense organ also?'

Physiology points to the nervous system behind the sense organ. All understanding, then, even physical experience, takes place within the system. If the system belongs to the experiencer, we are forced to come to the conclusion that all experience is

within. But the nervous system is not the final answer either. Every one of us is aware that we have to pay attention. When a sensation travels to the eye, to the brain, if we do not pay attention, even though it may have reached the nervous system, it does not register. When we are busy looking at something or thinking of something in a very concentrated manner, something may pass on the road or a noise arise which others see or hear, but we do not: we say that we were not paying attention.

So when you go deeply into human experience, you come to the understanding that all experience, whether it is physical or mental, is finally taking place within human understanding or awareness. Awareness has been given the blanket name of 'mind': we say that an experience takes place in the mind of man. It does not really prove that there is a physical world outside, it only proves that we have the ability to experience the physical world which *seems* to be external to understanding and to be standing outside oneself. The moment we try to analyse it, the moment we try to go deeper into it, we realize that the physical world is embedded in the mental plane which definitely belongs to oneself. There is not a single human being who will say that the mind does not belong to himself/herself. It is one's own mind, one's own understanding, which gives one the understanding of the physical world.

So the physical dimension, the multiple dimension, is part of human experience where we are aware of other human beings as bodies, the whole universe as the other. The experiencer is always one, it has got a single name, 'I'. This 'I' is in the direction of experiencer and the 'you' ('it') is always the other, that which is given to one in experience.

We find, then, that the waking state is

full of apparent multiplicity and we must go deeper. Just as an Einstein had to go deeper to search for the real nature of matter, material experience, there were people born in India who had this same kind of mind, who tried to ascertain the deeper levels of human experience.

In this regard we have the classical example of Buddha. He was a prince who had everything any human being could ask for and yet one day he had a desire to see the normal life led by ordinary people. This had been denied him by his father who had been told that the boy would renounce the world if he were given a glimpse of human misery.

So Buddha went out of his palace to observe normal humanity and he saw a person suffering from disease. He asked his charioteer, 'What is this?' 'He is an ordinary human being.' 'What is wrong with him?' 'He has a disease, that is all.' 'Is it going to happen to me also?' 'Probably. All humanity and everything on this earth can become diseased.'

Next he saw an old man and asked the same question, 'What is this?' He was told, 'Old age. There is nothing abnormal about it.' He said, 'Will I also become like that?' 'Why not? You are also a human being. It comes to everyone who is born.'

Then he saw a dead body. 'What is that?' 'That is a dead body. That is also very normal.'

Death should be accepted as a normal human experience but we find in this modern civilization, which we call a very progressive civilization, the scientific age where we are highly aware, that we try to hide certain facts from ourselves and from our children. We define old age as abnormal or disagreeable and put all old people in retirement centres so that they are not visible. We

put everyone suffering from disease in hospitals so that they are also not very visible. Lastly, we remove dead bodies as quickly as possible so that people are not exposed to death. We are doing this to ourselves at a tremendous risk of taking away a basic principle from humanity. Children learn to accept principles when they are young. What is the greatest principle? That every creature is born, every creature grows, every creature decays, and every creature dies. We are trying to ignore this and we try to keep it away from children.

The Buddha saw these three experiences of human life and then he saw a man who looked very serene. 'Who is this man?' he asked. 'He is a man who has renounced ordinary life. He is trying to achieve an extraordinary level of consciousness. Therefore he is serene.'

Buddha went home. He gave up his palace that night and went in search of that serenity. We call his life a classical example of the search within. Just as Einstein got his suggestions from the physical level, Buddha got his suggestions from a deeper level, the level of the mind, or the level of human relationships, or the level where the basic principle of humanity and all living things is given. He had to find out if there was a way that takes one beyond this principle which dominates everything on this earth and which gives so much pain.

What we are concerned with here is that the search is always within: there is no such thing as without. If human experience is within, it is always within, even though the first suggestion *seems* to come from the outside. The outside is nothing but an experience taking place within our own understanding.

We are told that the Buddha was overpowered with compassion, overpowered

with the pain humanity is forced to go through—disease, old age, death—a cycle from which no one is exempt. He wanted to find a way out of it. He underwent tremendous austerities until his body became a skeleton. Still he had not been able to find a way. Finally he sat down under a tree and said to his own mind, 'Until you give me an answer, I will not get up from this seat; I am going to concentrate.'

Concentration is something that ordinary people do all the time but what is important is the level at which one concentrates. We may concentrate at the physical level, through physical experience, because that seems to be the most real to us, or we can shift to another level which with advanced understanding becomes more real than that. To an Einstein the inside of matter became more real than the outside. The question, then, is simply the shifting of attention. The physical exterior no longer explained its own truth to Einstein; he had to go deeper. This he did within his own understanding. In exactly the same way, Buddha, wanting to understand why there is so much misery on this earth, also concentrated, but he concentrated at a deeper level where he believed the answer would be clear.

We are all aware that we have energy at our disposal, but we do not control it. The only difference between Einstein or Buddha and ourselves is that they have the ability to control their energies very easily. Superficially at least it seems to be easy in their case because we do not really understand the effort they put in to achieve this skill. We see that a Buddha is able to sit serenely in the lotus posture, but our mind and the energy within the mind, keep failing, get scattered and dissipated—unless we make a tremendous effort.

This 'making a tremendous effort' is the

last step in the struggle for evolution. If you believe that there are real obstacles, effort is absolutely necessary to overcome these, just as effort is necessary to climb Mt. Everest. The higher you want to climb, the more effort is necessary. The more you want to break away from the pull of gravity, the more fuel you must use. Within the human system there is a tremendous energy but, because it needs an intense effort, we do not tap it. What is necessary is to put a fuse to it. We must ignite it. We must use our attention like a match to strike at a very deep level so that energy, instead of falling to lower and lower levels, rises higher and higher. Concentration brings a deepening of the light within and we become more awake.

We have been ignorantly searching at the physical level for something more than food, clothing and shelter, and we have made our search at this level more and more complicated and more and more psychedelic. When finally we realize that such efforts only offer food, clothing and shelter, a few of us turn back and say, 'Let me search deeper, within.'

As we turn within, the search becomes a question of understanding and of dealing with very, very subtle symbols. We find that we have thoughts, we have feelings, we have sensations. Sensations lead us to outside physical experience, emotions lead us to relationships with other people on this earth and with ourselves through our nervous systems, our bodies and our sense organs. We relate through sensations, and we try to respond. Ordinarily we live at a subconscious level of habits. At the waking level, we try to break out of dreams and to live as awakened human beings, but it takes tremendous effort because the cerebrum has not awakened fully to its own capacity. A Buddha does research at a far deeper level. If we want to awaken as he awakened, we must be conscious in our thinking and our

feeling.

Such conscious thinking and conscious feeling, then, needs very great effort. We must remain awake at a level where we use symbols instead of physical objects. Einstein used arithmetic, algebra and geometry, which are very, very abstract symbols. His desire to understand led to the transformation of his thoughts and emotions, of his energy, to a very abstract level where symbols became meaningful. The end of Buddha's search was an overwhelming compassion which in turn aroused in humanity an unusual trust and great faith in him and his message. Here we have reached the level where the human response is emotional.

There is a last level of unity between subject and 'object. Buddha looked at the world, he felt its pain, and he wanted to discover a way to help it. Einstein looked at the world, felt that there was something which needed further explanation; he concentrated and awoke to a new worldview.

Ramakrishna is a simple and wonderful example and spokesperson of total illumination. In his life we see the physical world disappear into the mental, the mental world disappear into the emotional, and finally the emotional disappear into total illumination, total freedom, total happiness, total bliss, total light. If asked what he experienced, he said, 'Light. There was light everywhere. I was swimming in this light. I was part of it. There was no distinction between me and the surrounding universe.' This is the end of our search. At the physical level we look for light, at the mental level we look for light, at the emotional level we look for light and unity.

Human beings start their life's journey with the help of the senses. We ask the senses to give us the truth and they give us this multiple universe. We search for happiness,

unity, immortality, diseaselessness, old-agelessness, within this sense experience. We find it is not possible there. Perhaps in this lifetime we go to the next level, the level of ideas, where we search for the very same thing and perhaps we get a glimpse—but still more effort must be made at the emotional level. Emotions contain most of the energy of human beings; the problem is that we do not know how to convert them. Most of our emotions are waiting for response. We are looking for response at every single level: physical, mental, emotional, spiritual.

The journey is long, the search is always within, the canalizing of thought is always in one direction: towards unity. On the sense level, we may find a moment of unity, but again there is separation. We unite with something, but find that after some time it does not respond—or maybe it is we who do

not respond because we do not find it interesting enough. Then we shift to a human being. There is tremendous response. After some time something happens, no one knows how or why, but we find that there is no longer a response, so we want to shift again. Our mind keeps shifting, looking and searching for response, and the search continues deeper within. We are searching for a level where we will be true to ourselves, we will be true to an inner desire for freedom, for rest, for peace, for unity.

Einstein, Buddha, Ramakrishna each concentrated all his energy in one direction and made his discovery. Seeing their success enlivens faith in us and faith leads to understanding. One-pointed concentration affords spontaneous meditation. Meditation silences the turmoil going on within. When the turmoil is over, we become illumined. □

Work of the Ramakrishna Mission

It was the annual general meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission. When the agenda of the meeting had been gone through, the Swami [Premananda] thus spoke to all present:

Elephants have two sets of teeth, one outside—the tusks, and another inside, to munch food. The activities of our Mission are like the elephant's tusks. Whatever work you may do—conducting Sevashramas or doing relief work, unless you have character, all will be in vain. What is wanted is character, purity, steadfast devotion to God. If you have them, you will prosper; otherwise, you will totally fail. (*To lay members*) It is no good being only members of the Mission. You must build up your own character, you must make the whole world your own through love, so that people may find inspiration from your selflessness, renunciation,

and purity. You must drive away all egotism and pride from your heart and consider yourselves as servants of the Lord and thus serve humanity.

Our Master never sought name and fame, and so they have come to him in profusion. Swamiji often said in his later life that he was disgusted with name and fame. Be you all men of character. Do you grow into gods. Only then will the work of the Mission prosper. This is my earnest prayer to you all. □

Swami Premananda in
Spiritual Talks
 by the First Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna
 (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1991),
 pp. 78–9.

A Hundred Years Ago: The Year 1898

A band of minstrels came, played and left without anyone noticing the event. It appeared as if the advent of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother and Sri Ramakrishna's disciples was to be just like that. Yet we know that Sri Ramakrishna had formed the nucleus of the future Ramakrishna Math at Cossipore; he had made his disciples obtain their meals one day by begging as do sannyasins; and one day he had expressed that a grand renunciation was about to take place. He had commissioned Narendranath with the words, 'Naren will teach others; he will proclaim inside and outside India.' He had made Narendra the leader of the small group of all-renouncing young disciples and entrusted to him the divine mission. He had specifically told Narendranath to see that the boys do not return home and that they practise spiritual disciplines. The Holy Mother, on her part, had felt too unhappy to see the young disciples roam about in contrast to the ashramas in which Buddhist monks in Gaya stayed. Her heart went out in earnest prayer to the Master telling him that she could no more bear to see her children roam about as they were doing; she fervently prayed that they stay together in an ashrama practising spiritual disciplines and that they relieve the suffering of devotees who might visit the ashrama. As for Narendranath himself, he had a mission but knew not how he was to fulfil it; he had abundant love for his brother disciples and felt keenly that they were destined to do great things for India and the world. The picture was not yet clear how all this was to be brought about.

It was the last decade of the nineteenth century. This small group of homeless young men who had abandoned themselves to God acquired a plot of land on the bank of the Ganges as a site for their permanent

monastic home. The place was remote, jungly, marshy, with no electricity, gas or protected water supply. It was infested with malaria. Other than the river, the only access to the place was through a small lane, full of pits and ditches. This, in short, is the description of the new site.

That small plot of land acquired by the monks is today famous as the Belur Math, housing as it does the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission with their 135 branches spread all over the world, disseminating the liberal doctrine of Sri Ramakrishna, and extending every conceivable form of service to the afflicted, illiterate, downtrodden and handicapped in a spirit of worship of Shiva in the Jiva. How did this transformation take place? We cover here the salient events of the year 1898 when all this took place.

Purchase of the Land

Soon after his return to India from the West, Swami Vivekananda asked Swami Niranjanananda and Brahmachari Hariprasanna (later Swami Vijnanananda) to search for a suitable plot of land on the eastern bank of the Ganges considered as sacred and holy as Varanasi. Plots of land were either too small or costly. One day, when they were going north along the western bank by boat, they saw a plot of land covered with a jungle and with a bungalow. They found a canal nearby where some boats and crafts were tied to trees. They landed and on enquiry learnt that the plot of land belonged to one Sri Bhagavat Narayan Singh, a resident of Patna. They met the owner and he agreed to sell the plot of land.

While Miss Müller had objections to the purchase of the land as it was full of pits and ditches, Swamiji did not like the other choice at Peneti (Panihati), north of Dakshineswar,

as it was far from Calcutta and would cause immense hardship to the devotees eager to frequent the Math. Swamiji's wishes prevailed. Even long before he went to the West, Swami Vivekananda had told some of his brother disciples, while standing on the Baranagar ghat, and there was yet no thought of buying a site for the monastery, 'something tells me that our permanent Math will be in this neighbourhood across the river.'

Before the purchase of the land, Swamiji sent Swami Yogananda to see the proposed site and a few devotees too went with the Swami by boat. All were delighted to see the land. We must recall here that the Math was first established at Baranagar (in a dreary and dilapidated old building at 125/1 Pramanick Ghat Road for a rent of Rs. 11 per month; Rs. 6 went for the cook) and then it was shifted to Alambazar (located on the right side of the road from Alambazar to Lochan Ghosh's ghat, the Ramakrishna Sangha functioned here in a two-storeyed big house between November 1891 and February 1898) and Nilambar Mukherjee's garden-house (at 48, Lalababu Shire Road. The Math was shifted here on 13 February 1898 following awful damage to the Alambazar monastery caused by an earthquake on 12 June 1897). None of the sites proved satisfactory for what was to be a world-wide organization. Circumstances had been against the spirited monks and they had had to shift from one place to another. And the very sight of the huge land despite all the inconveniences it had, did delight the devotees who saw in it immense possibilities in future. A certain devotee said, 'There are two ponds, and the lotuses which will bloom in these can be offered to Sri Ramakrishna.' Today, we must recall this observation that their thinking was always oriented towards their ideal in life. Indeed the Math was for Sri Ramakrishna, his service in the form of puja and the spread of his liberal doctrine among the masses and aid

to the afflicted in a spirit of worship. Swami Yogananda did not speak a word but kept walking along the bank of the Ganges. There was delight written all over his face and a smile then revealed silently what he said later when questioned about the land: 'An excellent piece of land'. Returning to the Math, Swami Yogananda told Swamiji: 'A huge expanse of land, beautiful; just go once and see it for yourself.' What a tremendous faith Swamiji had in Swami Yogananda's verdict, he did not go to see the land to ascertain the suitability and simply accepted what his brother disciple said! [*Sri Ramakrishna Bhaktamalika*, (Calcutta: Udbodhan, B.S. 1379), p. 176]

Accordingly, Rs. 1001/- was paid on 3 February 1898 as advance and the balance amount of Rs. 38,999/- (totalling Rs. 40,000/-) was paid on 4 March 1898. The cost price was borne by Miss Henrietta Müller. The land was thus secured. On 5 March 1898, between 12 noon and 1 p.m., the indenture was presented at Howrah Sub-Registry Office for registration in the name of Swami Vivekananda.

The agreement between Sri Bhagavat Narayan Singh and Swami Vivekananda mentions '22 Bighas more or less' of land, whereas the Indenture by which Swamiji handed over the land to the Trustees on 6 February 1901 reads 'an area of 16 Bighas more or less', though no part of the land had been sold in the interim period.

A Brief Description

There was a southern gate (front door) opening to Kathgola Lane (now Sarat Atta Lane) and a small northern gate (back door) near Hem Pal Lane. The land was bounded on the north by the garden-house of Sri Haridhan Datta and partly by the land of Sri Shambhu Chandra Pal. Sri Datta's land was later purchased by Belur Math (during the time of Swami Shivanandaji Maharaj) and the house came to be known as Leggett House. This house was sanctified by the

Holy Mother who stayed in the room at the extreme south for some time. The garden came to be known as Sonār Bagān after Sona, the gardener.

On the south, the land was bounded partly by the land of Kumar Shrish Chandra Singh comprising the southern portion of the land between the Girish Memorial building and the cremation ground (now used for cultivation), and partly by the land of the vendor. This land measuring 50' by 44' houses the western part of Girish Memorial and the nearby servants' quarters. These lands were purchased by the Math later.

On the west there was a public road, Kathgola Lane, and the lands of Golam Asraff, Mahendra Lal Das and Beni Madhav Biswas. Golam Asraff's land was purchased by Saradapitha and ultimately by the Math. It houses the Mission's Relief Department and the Math's Arogya Bhavan. Sri Das and Sir Biswas sold their lands to the Math, the land being used for cultivation of paddy.

On the east courses the River Ganges, sacred to the Hindu, touching on its winding path first Dakshineswar sanctified by the Master's sadhana, then Belur Math, the mother centre and the origin of the spiritual stream, the Cossipore cremation ground where the Master's mortal remains were consigned to flames, and lastly the Nilambar Babu's garden-house, just a furlong from Belur Math where the direct disciples stayed with their sole possession, the Atmaramer Kauta, the relics of Sri Ramakrishna.

The Nature of the Land

A few words about the nature of the land will carry us back in imagination to those days. The land was almost uninhabitable, though there was a one-storeyed dwelling near the Math Ghat. The land between the present temples of Holy Mother and Swamiji was used as a small dockyard of Hore-Miller Company, and the three deodar trees still standing there were used for tying the craft and boats. A part of the land

was bounded by brick walls, and another section by a barbed wire fencing. The area was full of trees. There were three ponds—Gol-pukur (also called Gowāl-pukur), Padma-pukur and Pocha-pukur—none existing today, and a well which has since then been closed up.

South of the Gol-pukur (in front of the main temple) there were many banana trees, and before the purchase of the land the Holy Mother while passing by in a boat had had a vision of Sri Ramakrishna standing near the grove. While the pond and grove are non-existent today, the coconut trees that bordered the pond stand to this day reminding us of Gol-pukur, the banana grove and the Holy Mother's vision.

The Padma-pukur as the name implies was decked with lotuses that were used in worship. The pond was also surrounded by trees, two mango trees remaining to this day. The Pocha-pukur, so named because the water was not drinkable, was near the barbed fencing.

A bel tree near the present temple of Swamiji was a chief attraction for Swamiji and a place used for meditation by many monks since the early days. Swamiji had expressly desired that his mortal remains be consigned to the flames near that spot.

Another bel tree east of the present main temple is significant, for it was at its foot that Swamiji placed the Atmaramer Kauta when brought from Nilambar Mukherjee's house to the Math premises on his shoulder. Homa was performed on this occasion. More about this event later. At present there is a small garden and at a little distance, the portraits of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swamiji are decorated on the days of celebrations.

The small well just north of the jack tree in the Math courtyard was closed up. In those days, a palm tree, a bryonia tree, and a jack tree existed near this well. The jack tree remains as the solitary witness to this tale. In the courtyard itself, there were many trees

like mango, eucalyptus, etc. A lone mango tree supported well by walls remains today and under this very tree Swamiji used to sit on a camp cot. The courtyard is now paved and it is on this courtyard that Swamiji walked on his last day on this earth muttering those significant words, 'Only a Vivekananda can understand what this Vivekananda has done'. There are other memories associated with this courtyard. The Durga puja in those days was conducted in the space between what is known as Swamiji's room (where Swami Abhayanandaji Maharaj used to sit) and the old shrine. In this connection it may also be mentioned that the first Durga puja was performed in the year 1901 by Brahmachari Krishnalal with Srijiut Iswar Chandra Chakravorty, the able-bodied father of Swami Ramakrishnananda, as the *tantradharak*.

In later days the courtyard used to be swept clean by Brahmacharis because Mahapurush Maharaj had seen visions of Sri Ramakrishna walking on the courtyard. Mahapurushji therefore insisted on having the courtyard free from leaves and would be vexed on the Brahmachari whose duty it was, if he failed. Brahmacharis could be seen on their toes literally jumping on a leaf as it makes its zig-zag flight to the ground!

Recall the stairs leading up to the old shrine. 'Here is Brahman, here is Brahman', said Swamiji once as Baburam Maharaj was going up to do the worship of Sri Ramakrishna. All including Swami Premananda became still as Swamiji uttered these words and they were transported to a high realm.

When the land was purchased, there were two one-storeyed buildings near the Math Ghat and a small dilapidated room near the main gate. Of the two buildings, the bigger one had two rooms on the northern side and another on the southern, connected by a hall and an eastern verandah. This building now rises to the first floor and houses the 'Swami's room' on the 1st floor. For servants, there was another building

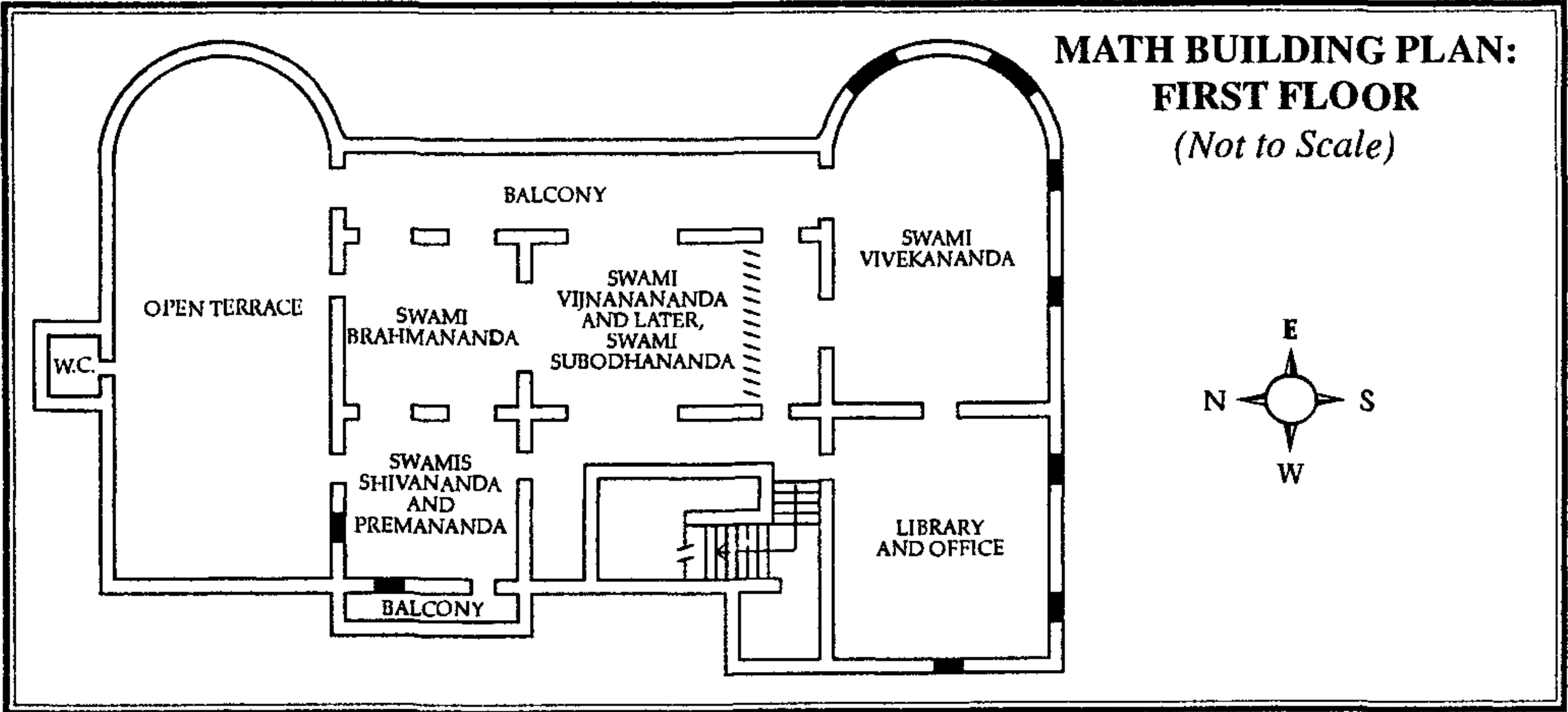
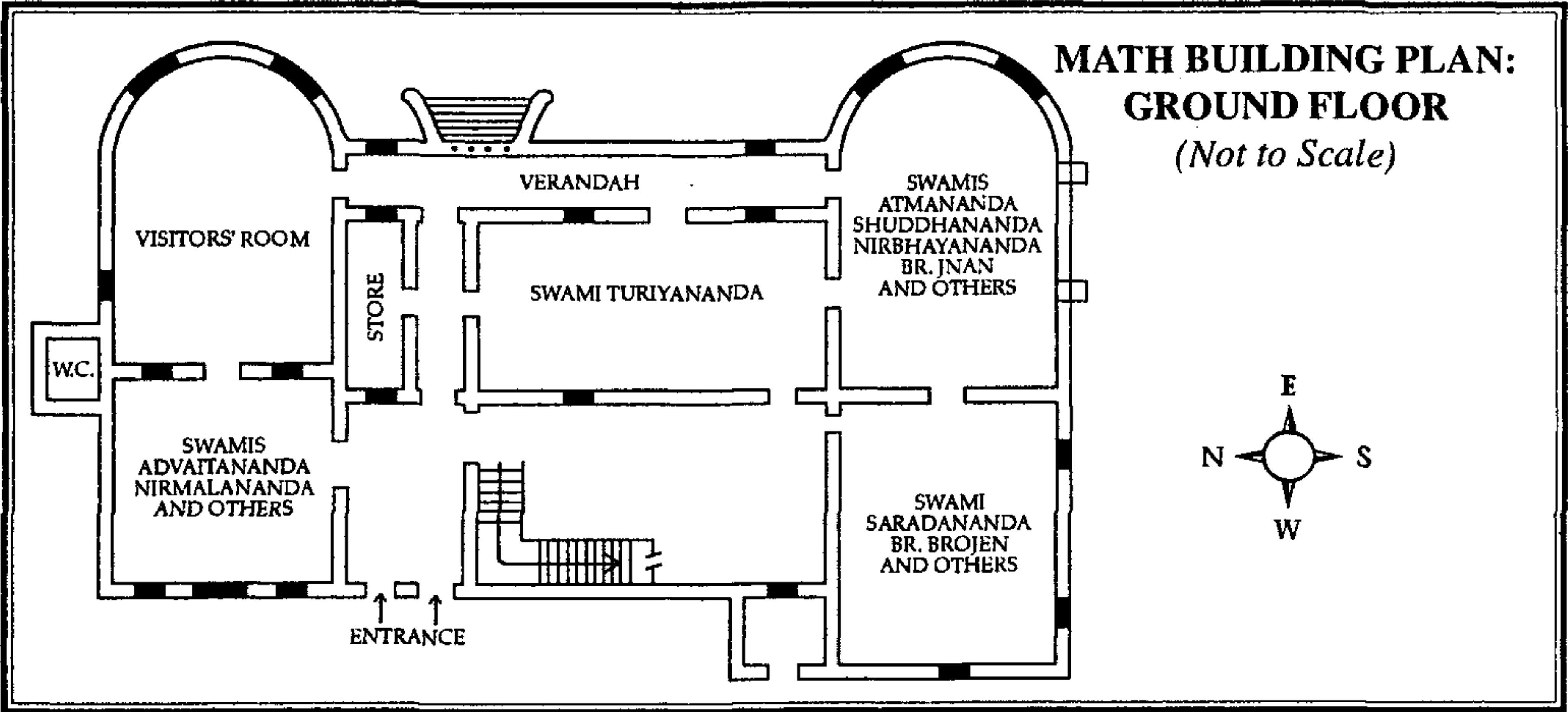
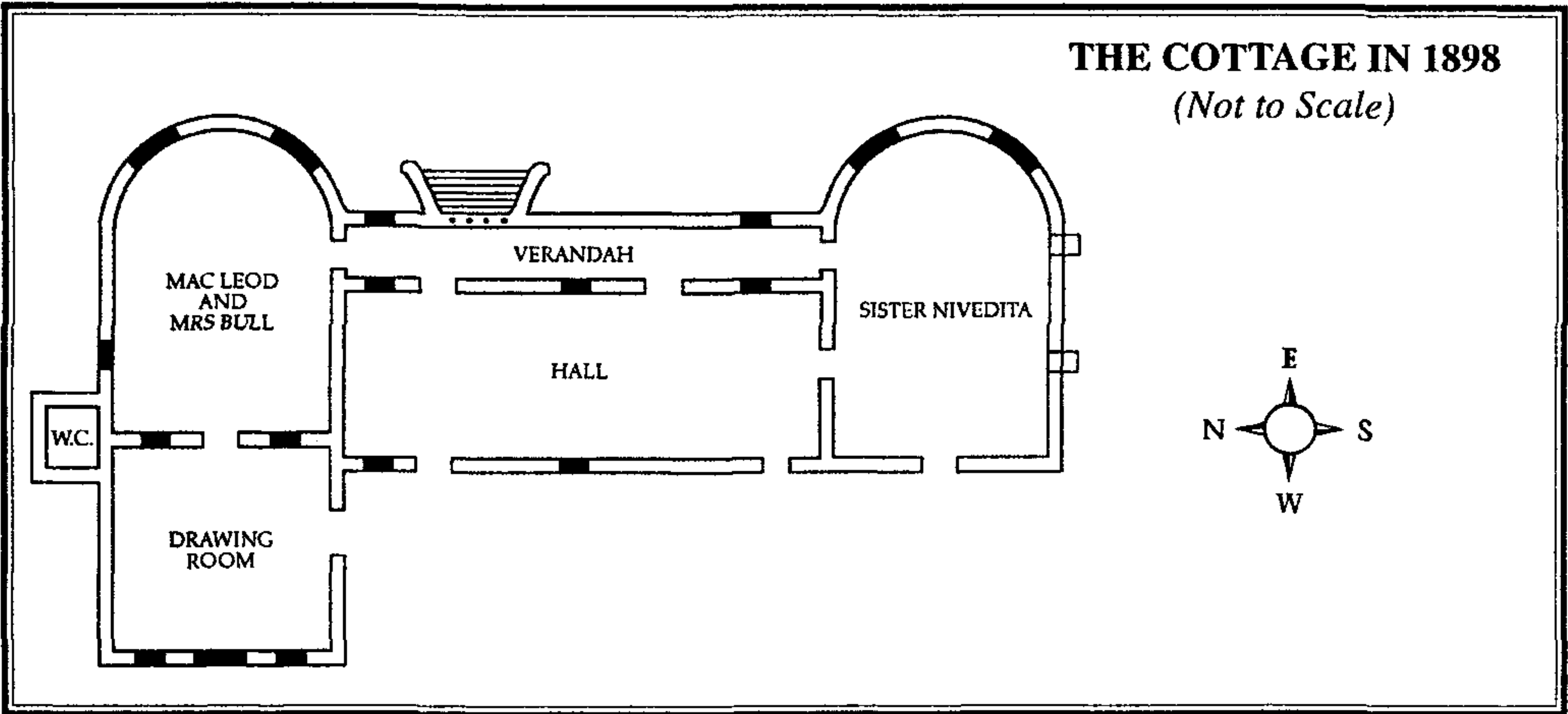
with three rooms.

Early Occupants

As mentioned earlier, the plot of land, just a furlong away from Nilambar Mukherjee's garden-house, was secured on 4 March 1898. On 28 January 1898, Miss Margaret Noble (later famous as Sister Nivedita) had arrived in Calcutta via Madras by S.S. *Mombasa*. On 14 February 1898, Swami Saradananda, accompanied by Mrs. Ole Bull and Miss Josephine MacLeod, had arrived in Calcutta. The three western friends, Miss MacLeod, Mrs. Ole Bull and Miss Margaret Noble, were at first living with Miss Müller in Calcutta. With Swamiji's permission, Miss MacLeod and Mrs. Ole Bull started living in the northern room facing Ganges. Nivedita used to stay in the southern room. The other northern room was used as the drawing room. The western ladies white-washed the rooms and bought old mahogany furniture. The rooms were intended to be decorated in western style but at Swamiji's intervention, the drawing room was furnished half in Indian style and half in western style. The central hall was used as the dining room. The group of women devotees stayed here for two months till they left for Kashmir with Swamiji in the first week of May.

Referring to these days Swamiji writes to Sister Christine on 11 March 1898 (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 9, p. 101):

Mrs. Bull of Boston and Miss MacLeod of New York are now in India. We have changed our Math from the old, nasty house to a house on the banks of the Ganges. This is much more healthy and beautiful. We have also got a good piece of land very near on the same side where Mrs. Bull and Miss MacLeod are putting up now. It is wonderful how they accommodate themselves to our Indian life of privation and hardship! My, these



Yanks can do anything! After the luxuries of Boston and New York, to be quite content and happy in this wretched little house!! We intend to travel a bit together in Kashmir...

From Nilambar Mukherjee's garden house Swamiji used to come daily to this cottage under renovation to hold long talks and discussions with his western disciples over a cup of tea. The subject of discussion was usually Indian and Western history and culture. Obviously, there was a need to introduce to his western disciples the Indian mode of thinking and to contrast it to their own way of thinking so that they may better appreciate the Indian outlook.

Construction Work

Immediately after purchasing the land Swamiji entrusted Brahmachari Hariprasanna (later Swami Vijnanananda) and Swami Advaitananda with the task of levelling the ground, remodelling the cottage and constructing a shrine, etc. The land was levelled with rubble from a near-by brick factory. Br. Hariprasanna had to go from Salkia to Serampore (Srirampur), even upto Konnagar, to do all this work.

At first the courtyard in front of the cottage was levelled, as a new building was to be constructed there. Work actually started in April 1898. At Swami Brahmananda's direction a renowned engineer was consulted about the reconstruction or remodelling of the existing cottage. After inspecting the site on 14 July, the engineer opined that the plinth was strong enough for the construction of another floor. Some trees in the courtyard were cut down, work on the foundation of a new building (the old shrine) was started and a new plan was prepared to remodel the existing cottage. A substantial donation of Rs. 100,000 from Mrs. Ole Bull went towards the expenses of the shrine construction and an endowment for the maintenance of the monastery.

Construction work went on at a brisk pace. A platform was built around the bel tree (near Swamiji's temple) for the monks to sit upon and meditate. Many trees on the southern lawn were cut down as it was decided to hold the celebrations there. The shrine building was constructed in seven months and remodelling of the cottage and servants' quarters took less than five months. In a little over eight months (from April to beginning of December 1898) the construction and remodelling work was completed. The rest of the courtyard was also levelled. The level of the Math ground in those early days was much lower than it is today. It was subsequently raised by 3 to 3½ feet.

Some Important Events in 1898

We must now go back in time once again to visualize some of the events that occurred in the year 1898. On 6 February, the auspicious full moon day, Swami Vivekananda with all the monks arrived by boats at the Ramakrishnapore Ghat for performing the consecration of the shrine in the newly built house of Babu Navagopal Ghosh, a householder disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. A Sankirtana procession was started in which joined devotees as the party moved through the streets. This generated a tremendous enthusiasm. With a *khol* (drum) hanging about his neck, Swamiji walked along singing the hymn of nativity to Sri Ramakrishna composed by Babu Girish Chandra Ghosh. It commences with the line, '*Dukhini brahmanir kole ke shuyeccho alo kare...*' which translated into English runs, 'Lying on the lap of the poor Brahmana spouse,/ Who art Thou, O Radiant One?/ Who art Thou, O Naked One, come to the humble cottage-room/ Grieved at the world's sore afflictions,/ Hast Thou come with Thy heart bleeding for us?' The Swami himself led the chorus. When the crowd that gathered to watch this memorable event found that Swami Vivekananda of world-

fame was moving along the streets clad in simple ochre cloth like any other sannyasin, barefoot, and singing songs and playing on the drum, they cheered him heartily. The Swami and his party was received at the house of Navagopal Ghosh with great reverence amidst blowing of conches and sounding of gongs. After a while Swamiji was taken to the beautifully fitted shrine which had a marble floor. On the throne was a picture of Sri Ramakrishna in porcelain. The Swami was deeply impressed. He expressed his delight to the lady of the house, who in all humility said that they were too poor and unworthy to serve the Lord properly. To this Swamiji made the observation, 'Dear Mother, our Lord never in his life lived in such a marble-floored room. Born in a rustic, thatched hut, he spent his days in the simplest way. And, if he does not live here, with all these services of devoted hearts, I do not know where else he will!' Covering himself with ashes, the Swami took the worshipper's seat and invoked the presence of Sri Ramakrishna, while his disciple, Swami Prakashananda, recited the prescribed *mantras*. It was on this occasion that Swamiji, after a while of meditation, initiated the use of the special 'Salutation to Sri Ramakrishna' by composing the following Sanskrit verse: *Sthāpakāya ca harmasya sarva-dharma-svarūpine; Avatāravariṣṭhāya rāma-kṛṣṇāya te namaḥ* which translates to 'Salutation to Thee, O Ramakrishna, the Reinstator of Religion, the Embodiment of all Religions, the Greatest of all Incarnations!'

The Shivaratri festival fell on 19 February 1898. The Math was then at Nilambar Mukherjee's garden-house. It was another specially happy occasion because it witnessed a reunion of many of the brother disciples of Swamiji. Swami Saradananda had just returned from America, Swami Shivananda from Ceylon, and Swami Trigunatitananda from Dinajpur after finishing the famine relief work there. Swami Vivekananda expressed great satisfaction at the

work performed by each of them and spoke in glowing terms about the successful guidance of the Ramakrishna Mission by Swami Brahmananda during Swamiji's absence. He spoke highly about the training given by Swami Turiyananda to the young monks and brahmacharins. At a pleasant function in the afternoon, Swami Vivekananda presented a thanksgiving address in English to each of the swamis prepared beforehand by Swami Turiyananda as instructed by Swamiji. The monks were then called upon to give suitable replies which they did. This was followed by an hour-long lecture from Swamiji giving good counsel to his brother disciples and to his own disciples. It is customary for Hindus to fast and observe night vigil on this holy day. Swamiji was, however, pained to see that the monks had not been fasting. When Swami Shuddhananda came to take his meals, Swamiji after enquiring him whether fasting suited his health advised him to do so, also permitting him to take some fruits.

The next happy and memorable occasion was the *Janmatithi* (the birth tithi anniversary) of Sri Ramakrishna on 22 February. There was an unprecedented enthusiasm and the festivities carried out under Swami Vivekananda's personal supervision had some unique features. Sushil and Sudhir acted as the worshipper and the *tantradharak* respectively. More than one hundred persons partook of *prasād* that day. After the ceremonial rites were over, Swami Vivekananda asked his disciple, Sri Sarat Chandra Chakravarti, whether he had brought the sacred threads as instructed by him. Swamiji was told that all arrangements had been made. The disciple then asked Swamiji the reason for his being asked to procure such a large number of sacred threads. Swamiji replied that it was his intention to invest with the sacred thread those devotees assembled on the occasion who belonged to the twice-born castes (Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas) but had not till then been invested

with the sacred thread. He further said, 'This is the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna. Everyone will be purified by taking his name. Therefore this is the best occasion to give the *bhaktas* the sacred thread. Give all those who come the appropriate *Gayatri Mantram* according as they are Kshatriyas or Vaishyas. All these must be raised to the status of Brahmanas. All Hindus are brothers.' On that day more than fifty *bhaktas* received the *Gayatri Mantram* and the sacred thread after taking bath in the Ganges and bowing before Sri Ramakrishna.

After the ceremony was over, the monks of the monastery decorated the person of Swamiji as Siva. All those assembled including the Swami himself felt a transformation. The Swami 'appeared entranced in Siva nature'. He sat in *padmasana* (lotus posture), eyes half-shut, playing on a *tanpura* and singing sweetly a song to Sri Rama, the chosen ideal of Siva as well as of Swamiji. For more than half an hour intense stillness prevailed and all sat motionless. Describing this sight fit for gods, Sarat Chandra Chakravarti writes, 'The unspeakable beauty of that form of the Swami dressed as Siva cannot be described; it is something which has to be seen, to be realized. All present declared afterwards that they felt as if Siva Himself, of youthful, ascetic form, was before them. And the Swami, with the sannyasins seated round him like so many Bhairavas (the traditional attendants of the great God), seemed to have brought the exalted atmosphere of Kailasa into the precincts of the Math.' Then Swami Saradananda followed with the song, 'The Hymn of Creation' composed by Swamiji. His melodious voice coupled with the sweet and solemn sound of *pakhwaj* played by Swamiji himself had the effect of surcharging everyone. After a while, Swamiji suddenly rose and, taking off his decorations one by one, dressed up Babu Girish Chandra Ghosh in them. He then smeared Girish's body with ashes and finally asked him to put on the

ochre cloth with the remark, 'Paramahansa Deva used to say that G.C. was born of the part of Bhairava. There is no difference between him and us.' Swamiji thereafter asked Girish to say something on Sri Ramakrishna to the assembled devotees. Girish, who had at his command all that endeared him to people as a great litterateur, found himself mute, eyes filled with tears, and mind carried away by emotion. All he could say after a long silence was well said, 'What shall I speak of our all-merciful Lord! His infinite grace I feel in that he has given even an unworthy self like me the privilege of sitting on the same seat with such pure souls like you who have renounced *kamini-kanchana* (lust and gold), even from boyhood!'

In the afternoon, Swamiji briefly addressed those who had received the sacred thread, asking them to repeat the *Gayatri Mantram* at least a hundred times a day. Meanwhile, Mahendra Nath Gupta (M.) had come and stood in a corner. On being asked repeatedly by Swamiji to do so, M. took his seat. After some time Swami Akhandananda arrived from his orphanage bringing with him from Murshidabad two sweetmeats called *pantuas*, which together weighed something like a maund and a half! Swamiji praised his brother disciple for his work, 'for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many' and said that he was a true *karma-yogin*. Swamiji then gave a discourse in which he pointed out how the realization of the Self could be reached by working for others. He then sang the 'Nativity Hymn of Sri Ramakrishna' composed by Girish Chandra Ghosh mentioned earlier.

Narendranath had composed a beautiful *aratrika* song (*Khaṇḍana-bhava-bandhana, jagavandana vandi tomāy/Nirāñjana nararūpa-dhara nirguṇa guṇamay/Namo namo prabhu vākya manātita/Manovacāniakādhār/Jyotir jyoti ujala hṛdikandara/tumi tamobhañjanahār/Dhe dhe dhe laṅga raṅga bhaṅga, bāje aṅga saṅga mṛdaṅga/Gāiche chanda bhakatavṛnda, ārati tomār*). The other stanzas were added later

by Swamiji himself at Belur Math. At the time of evening *arati* this song was sung.

The public celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday fell on 27 February. The observation by such a public celebration had been started by Surendranath Mitra and other devotees in 1881, while Sri Ramakrishna was still alive, and had been celebrated annually at Dakshineswar. It had continued each year since then, and had given everybody an opportunity to gather in one place for a shared purpose, with brotherly feelings. However, in 1898, the Trustees of the Kali temple at Dakshineswar raised the objection that the place would be defiled if the foreign disciples of the Swami attended the festival. Under these circumstances, the monks would have preferred to have had the celebrations on the newly acquired Math grounds itself. But as we have noted earlier, the land was jungly, uneven and full of ditches and canals—unfit for the purpose. Though Swami Vivekananda, with his characteristic enthusiasm, had written to Swami Ramakrishnananda on 25 February 1898, 'Today we take possession of the land we have bought, and though it is not practicable to have the *Mahotsava* on it just now, I must have something on it on Sunday. Anyhow, Shriji's relics must be taken to our place for the day and worshipped', we must not fail to take note of the fact that the full amount for the land was paid only 4 March and it was only on 5 March 1898, between 12 noon and 1 p.m., that the indenture was presented at Howrah Sub-Registry Office for registration in the name of Swami Vivekananda. Added to this, the condition of the land was too bad for a celebration.

Ultimately, the sixty-fifth birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated at the Radha Ramanji Thakurbari of Purnachandra Daw. This was at Bally, on the same bank of the Ganges as Belur, but slightly up the river. Arrangements were made for the steamers to ply between Calcutta and Thakurbari Ghat and the celebra-

tion took place with its usual impressiveness and fervour. The *Indian Mirror* of 3 March reported, 'Last Sunday [27 February] Lower Bengal witnessed a Hindu religious festival, the importance, grandeur and solemnity of which could better be imagined than described.... Swami Vivekananda, who being pressed by the crowd, delivered a short address suited for the occasion, with his fascinating appearance and charming lustrous eyes, always drew a great multitude of people around him....' A grand success as it was, it put to shame Trailokya Babu, to whom, or to whose action of objecting to the celebration at Dakshineswar, none among the thousands who took part in it at Bally, gave a thought.

All the four western disciples of Swamiji—Miss Müller, Mrs. Ole Bull, Miss Josephine MacLeod and Miss Margaret Noble—participated in the celebration. Miss Noble gives a vivid description of the events of the day. Before coming to the celebration, Miss Noble, accompanied by Miss Müller and an Indian friend who acted as the guide, arrived by boat at Dakshineswar, the fountain-head of the inspiration that was coming over her soul at this time. By a notice, entrance was forbidden to all 'Christians and Mussalmans'. So, after getting down from the boat they climbed the steps and, walking along the lane past the gate of the temple and Sri Ramakrishna's room, went to Panchavati. As Miss Noble sat here musing on one who had done so for numerous days and nights contemplating on the Mother of the Universe, an hour passed by without her knowing it. She was roused from her reverie by a protesting, angry group of people who had collected round them, feeling outraged at the presence of unholy *mlechchas* in the holy precincts; they also questioned the right of an English woman to wear the robe of renunciation. The Indian guide, Rakhal Babu, explained to them that though they were foreigners, they were devotees and so entitled to be admitted into Sri Rama-

krishna's room. Then, quite unexpectedly, whatever the reason, the same men, who had considered the whole place to be polluted because of their visit, went inside Sri Ramakrishna's room and throwing open the door, cordially invited the party to enter. The hours spent at Dakshineswar and her admission into Sri Ramakrishna's room seemed to Miss Noble to have something of an esoteric significance.

Crossing the river by boat they came to the place of the celebration at Bally. Not only did the whole crowd of visitors enthusiastically welcome them but the old, orthodox, Brahmin lady, Gopaler-Ma touched their chins and kissed them. Outside, there were great musical centres where a number of men danced or sat cross-legged to sing strange old chants and songs of devotion to the accompaniment of musical instruments. In another part of the grounds, the monks attended by their Brahmin cook were busily engaged in feeding the people. Something like 20,000 people, including children, were fed in the course of the day and the quietness and regularity of the feast were marvellous. The greatest attraction was a shrine on a little height where a sort of altar had been erected before the portion of Sri Ramakrishna. The pillars and arches were a mass of marigold; under the roof hung a canopy made of jessamine buds threaded in a net, and wherever a flower could be offered there were roses.

In a letter dated 6 March 1898, Swami Premananda wrote to Swami Ramakrishnananda, 'Last Sunday, the public celebration in connection with Sri Ramakrishna's birth anniversary was successfully held. It was almost like every other year. On that day Narendra himself carried Thakur (referring to the sacred urn containing Sri Ramakrishna's relics which Miss Noble refers to as 'the portion of Sri Ramakrishna') to the new land and worshipped him and performed homa. And *payasanna* was offered.' In a letter to Swami Rama-

krishnananda dated March 1898 Swamiji writes, 'Rakhal is living with the new land and buildings. I was not satisfied with the *Mahotsava* this year. What it should be is a grand mixture of all the different phases here. We shall try it next year—I shall send instructions.' It is not likely that the relics were taken *both* to the Radha Ramanji Thakurbari of Purnachandra Daw and to the new Math land on the *same* day, that worship was performed in *both* places and that there was feeding at the Daw's and homa in the Math land. In all likelihood, the function took place only at the Daw's and the place of the Daw's certainly was a new venue for the worship which in previous years used to be held at Dakshineswar.

The next important event is a memorable one in the life of Miss Noble. On the morning of 25 March, the Christian Feast of Annunciation, the Swami went to the cottage where Miss Noble was staying with Miss MacLeod and Mrs. Bull, and brought them to the temporary Math in the Nilambar Mukherjee's garden-house. There he took Miss Noble to the shrine-room, taught her the worship of Siva, and then went through a simple ritual of initiation. Thus did Noble become a Brahmacharini with the name Nivedita meaning 'one who is dedicated'. The name was appropriate for one who had resolved to dedicate her life to the service of India and to the Swami's work.

Also remarkably significant was the acceptance of the western women disciples by the Holy Mother who addressed her visitors as 'my children'. About this event Swamiji writes to Swami Ramakrishnananda, 'Shri (Holy) Mother is here, and the European and American ladies went the other day to see her, and what do you think, *Mother ate with them even there!* Is not that grand?' They were equally accepted by Gopaler-Ma who too went to the extent of eating with them and, a week later, stayed with them for three days.

Another event was the initiation into

Sannyasa of Swamis Swarupananda and Sureshwarananda on 29 March. About the former, Swamiji had said, 'We have made an *acquisition* today!' In contrast with the general practice of the Order, he was initiated after only a few days' stay at the Math. Within a few months, consequent on the death of B.R. Rajam Iyer the first editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*, he was made the editor of *Prabuddha Bharata* and sent to Almora.

Many distinguished visitors came to meet Swamiji among whom special mention should be made of the Buddhist Missionary, Anagarika Dharmapala. It was a rainy day. Dharmapala had first come to the monastery to ask the Swami to accompany him to see Mrs. Ole Bull. Across very uneven ground, muddy and slippery because of the rain, the two walked, drenched in rain, their feet slipping in the mud. There was merriment, shouting and laughter as of little boys. At one place Dharmapala had to be pulled out to extricate himself for his feet got stuck very deep into the mud. At the cottage on the new Math land, all went to wash their feet. When Swamiji saw Dharmapala take a pitcher of water, he seized it from him saying, 'You are my guest, and I must have the privilege of serving you!' He would have succeeded in washing the feet of Dharmapala had it not been for loud protests from the latter.

We have mentioned earlier that the construction work had been entrusted to Hariprasanna and it took about eight months from April 1898 to December 1898 to complete the construction and remodeling work. On 30 March Swamiji left for Darjeeling with Swami Nirbhayananda and Babu Nityagopal Bose and came back to Calcutta on 3 May. Meanwhile plague had broken out in Calcutta and this affected both the health and mood of Swamiji. He observed, 'We have to serve them, even though we are required to sell everything. We were only wandering monks living under a tree. We shall stay under a tree.' Seeing that peo-

ple were fleeing in panic, the Swami drafted a plague manifesto in Bengali and Hindi on the day of his arrival at the Math and he wanted relief operations to start forthwith. When a brother monk asked him, 'Swamiji, where will the funds come from?' he replied with a sudden fierceness of decision, 'Why, we shall sell the newly-bought Math grounds if necessary! We are sannyasis; we must be ready to sleep under the trees and live on daily Bhiksha (alms) as we did before. What! Should we care for Math and possessions when by disposing of them we could relieve thousands suffering before our eyes!' However, he soon received promises of ample funds and this extreme measure was not necessitated. The relief that this service afforded the plague patients was immense and the measures adopted by the Swami gave the people great confidence. The Swami stayed in Calcutta until the possibility of an epidemic had passed and the stringent plague regulations had been withdrawn. Thereafter, he started for Almora in the Himalayas with a large party on 11 May.

At Almora Swamiji received many shocking news. The first was a telegram received on 3 June stating, 'Goodwin died last night at Ootacamund'. He had died of enteric fever on June 2. The news was not broken to Swamiji till the morning of Monday, June 6. Though the Swami took the loss calmly, he could not forget Goodwin's long service full of devotion and he said, 'Now my right hand is gone. My loss is incalculable.' He complained of the weakness that brought the image of his most faithful disciple constantly to his mind. He would break out with some bitter utterance against the folly of imagining Personal Will to guide the universe. He exclaimed, 'As if it would not be one's right and duty to fight such a God and slay Him, for killing Goodwin!—And Goodwin, if he had lived, could have done so much!' He took away a few faulty lines of someone's writing and brought back a beautiful little poem, 'Requiescat in Pace' in

which nothing of the original was left. This was sent to Goodwin's widowed mother as his memorial for her son, along with a short letter.

The second was the death of Pavahari Baba, which news reached the Swami by letter on June 5. The letter read, 'Pavahari Baba has completed all his sacrifices with the sacrifice of his own body. He has burnt himself in his sacrificial fire.'

The third rude shock was the death of B.R. Rajam Iyer in May 1898 at the age of twenty-six. A gifted young man, a true Vedantist and an ardent admirer of the Swami, he had managed the publication of *Prabuddha Bharata* at the behest of the Swami. The Magazine had ceased publication as a result of this calamity. Swamiji had always a special affection for the magazine and now wished to revive it with the help of Mr. and Mrs. Sevier and Swami Swarupananda. So he told Mr. Sevier, 'Sevier, you said you would work for the good of India. The climate of Bengal will not suit you. So why don't you stay somewhere near Almora and undertake to conduct *Prabuddha Bharata*? The journal has got over three thousand subscribers. It was first printed on my advice, and has gradually become a notable instrument for the dissemination of Vedantic knowledge. I don't wish that it should be discontinued. And I am giving you a capable editor. Swami Swarupananda has particular experience in that line, and with the help of yourself and Swami Turiyananda, he will easily be able to run it.' It was agreed that the *Prabuddha Bharata* office should be transferred from Madras to 'Thompson House', the rented house at Almora where Mr. and Mrs. Sevier had been staying. The printing-press and materials were brought up from Calcutta, and the first issue from the Almora office was published in August 1898. Mr. Sevier acted as the manager. He also met all the initial expenses in connection with the purchase and transport of the hand-press, the type, paper and other things

needed. For the first number of the revived magazine Swami Vivekananda sent from Srinagar a poem, 'To the Awakened India', calling on *Prabuddha Bharata* to resume its march and to speak its stirring words, till Truth and Truth alone in all its glory shines.

Of the two important events in Kashmir, the first is Swamiji's visit to Amarnath on 2 August. After bathing in the stream there, Swamiji reached the cave, his whole frame shaking with emotion. His body covered with ashes, his face aflame with devotion to Siva, the Swami entered the shrine itself, wearing only a loin cloth, and prostrated in adoration before the Lord. A song of praise from a hundred throats resounded in the cave, and the shining purity of the Siva-linga overpowered him. He almost swooned with emotion. A profound mystical experience came to him, of which he never spoke, beyond saying that Siva Himself had appeared before him, and that he (the Swami) had been granted the grace of Amarnath, the Lord of Immortality, namely not to die until he himself should choose to do so. Whether on account of the mystical experience, or due to extreme cold, physical exertion and lack of oxygen, or due to both, the Swami had a permanent enlargement of the heart. So saturated did Swamiji become with the Presence of Siva, that for days after he could speak of nothing except Siva. Siva was all in all: Siva, the Eternal One, the Great Monk rapt in meditation, aloof from the world.

The second event was his visit to Kshir Bhavani. The Swami retired abruptly on 30 September to the Coloured Springs of Kshir Bhavani leaving strict instructions that none was to follow him there. Before this famous shrine of the Mother he daily performed Homa, and worshipped Her with offerings of Kshira made from one maund of milk, rice and almonds. He told his beads like a humble pilgrim, and worshipped a Brahmin pandit's little daughter as Uma Kumari, the Divine Virgin. He be-

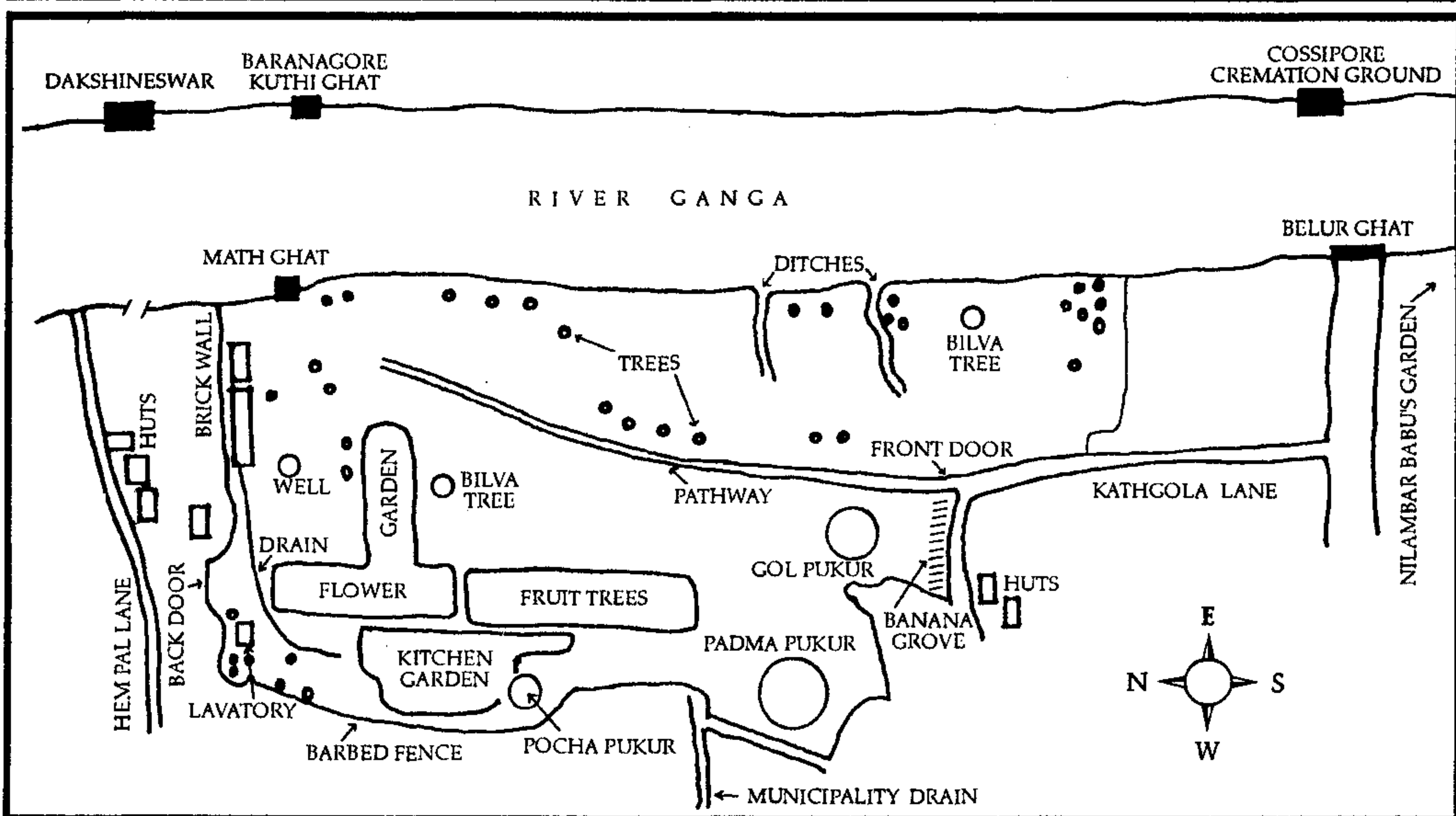
gan to practise the sternest austerities. It seemed as though he would tear off all the veils that had come upon his soul through years of work and thought, and again be a child before the Divine Mother. It was not until 6 October that he returned from here. One day he had been pondering over the ruination and the desecration of the temple wrought by the Muslim invaders. Distressed at heart he thought, 'How could the people have permitted such sacrilege without offering strenuous resistance! If I were here then, I would never have allowed such things, I would have laid down my life to protect the Mother.' It was then he heard the Mother speak, 'What, even if unbelievers should enter My temples, and defile My images! What is that to you? Do *you* protect Me? Or do *I* protect you?' As the effect of this experience, Swamiji began to say, 'No more Hari Om! It is all Mother now. All my patriotism is gone. Now it is only Mother! Mother!' It was another day that he heard the Mother say, 'My child! if I so wish, I can have innumerable temples and magnificent monastic centres. I can even this moment

raise a seven-storeyed golden temple on this very spot.' 'Since I heard that voice,' said the Swami to a disciple in Calcutta much later, 'I have ceased making any more plans. Let these things be as the Mother wills!'

The Swami and his disciples returned from the pilgrimage and reached the monastery, still in Nilambar Mukherjee's garden-house, on 18 October. On 5 November the Swami received at the Math Sri Rishibar Mukherjee (Chief Justice) and Sri Nilambar Mukherjee (Prime Minister of Kashmir). Since arrangements were being made for shifting the monastery to the new site, Miss MacLeod and Mrs. Bull could no more stay at the cottage in the Math compounds, and they had to stay with Nivedita at 16 Bosepara Lane. Upon persistent requests the Holy Mother agreed at this time to have her photograph taken. When the photographer came, the Holy Mother cast down her eyes and went into a trance. That was the first photograph taken of the Mother. Another photo was taken after she regained the normal state. A third photograph was taken with Nivedita facing her.

BELUR MATH 1899

(Not to Scale)



It was the day preceding the annual Kali worship (12 November 1898), and the monks made preparations for the worship at the Belur Math. The Mother went there in the morning with the picture of Sri Ramakrishna which she worshipped daily. After alighting from the boat at the monastery at Nilambar Mukherjee's garden house, she proceeded on foot to the new site and after cleaning a spot with her own hands, worshipped Sri Ramakrishna there. At noon she returned to the monastery where she took some *prasada*. In the afternoon, Sister Nivedita took her along with Swamis Vivekananda, Brahmananda and Saradananda to 16 Bosepara Lane, where the Sister's Girls' School was inaugurated and blessed by the Holy Mother on the 13th morning.

Either during this or some other visit of the Holy Mother to the Math land, Swami Vivekananda went round with her and said, 'This is your own place, Mother; and here you move about at ease.' The Mother said afterwards about this land, 'Of a truth, I always saw as though the Master lived on the land on the other side of the Ganges, in a cottage just where the present monastery and plantain trees are.' This vision referred to a time when the land had not been purchased.

The work of completion of the new buildings and renovation of the old was complete. It was 9 December 1898. The Math was still at the Nilambar Mukherjee's garden-house. In the morning Swamiji had his bath in the Ganga and entered the worship-room. Then he made offerings to the sacred Padukas (slippers) of Sri Ramakrishna and fell to meditation. Meditation and worship over, preparations were now made for going to the new Math premises. Swamiji himself took on his right shoulder the ashes of Sri Ramakrishna's body preserved in a copper casket, and led the van. The disciple in company with other Sannyasins brought up the rear. There was the music of bells and conchs. On his way Swamiji said to the dis-

ciple, 'Sri Ramakrishna said to me, "Wherever you will take me on your shoulders, there I will go and stay, be it under a tree or in a hut." It is therefore that I am myself carrying him on my shoulders to the new Math grounds. Know it for certain that Sri Ramakrishna will keep his seat fixed there, for the welfare of the many, for a long time to come.'

On reaching the Math grounds, Swamiji took the casket down from his shoulder, placed it on the carpet spread on the ground, and bowed before it touching the ground with his forehead. Others too followed suit. Then Swamiji again sat for worship. After going through the Puja (worship), he lighted the sacrificial fire, made oblations to it, and himself cooking Payasa (milk-rice with sugar) with the help of his brother-disciples, offered it to Sri Ramakrishna. Probably also he initiated certain householders on the spot that day. All this ceremony being done, Swamiji cordially addressed the assembled gentlemen and said, 'Pray today all of you, heart and soul, to the holy feet of Sri Ramakrishna, that the great Avatara of this cycle that he is, he may "For the welfare of the many, and for the happiness of the many", reside in this holy spot from this day for a great length of time, and ever continue to make it the unique centre of harmony amongst all religions.' Everyone prayed like that with folded palms. Swamiji next called the disciple and said, 'None of us (Sannyasins) have any longer the right to take back this casket of Sri Ramakrishna, for we have installed him here today. It behoves you, therefore, to take it on your head back (to Nilambar Babu's garden)'. Seeing that the disciple hesitated to touch the casket, Swamiji said, 'No fear, touch it, you have my order.' The disciple gladly obeyed the injunction, lifted the casket on his head, and moved on. He went first, next came Swamiji, and the rest followed. Swamiji said to the disciple on the way, 'Sri Ramakrishna has today sat on your head and is blessing you.'

Take care, never let your mind think of anything transitory, from this day forth.' Before crossing a small bridge, Swamiji again said to him, 'Beware, now, you must move very cautiously.'

Thus all safely reached the Math and rejoiced. Swamiji now entered into a conversation with the disciple, in the course of which he said, 'Through the will of Sri Ramakrishna, his *Dharmakshetra*—sanctified spot—has been established today. A twelve years' anxiety is off my head. Do you know what I am thinking of at this moment?—This Math will be a centre of learning and spiritual discipline. Householders of a virtuous turn like yourselves will build houses on the surrounding land and live there, and Sannyasins, men of renunciation, will live in the centre, while on that plot of land on the south of the Math, buildings will be erected for English and American disciples to live in.' Some of the inmates stayed on at the new premises from this day while all others finally shifted to the new site on 2 January 1899. The Math Diary shows an entry against 9 December 1898: 'Thakur was taken to the new Math and the new Math was consecrated.'

Thus came about the long-cherished desire of the Holy Mother to have a monastery for such of her children as would renounce their all for the sake of the Master and for such others of her children as have taken refuge in the Master and are in need of solace and spiritual counsel. Thus did Narendranath fulfil the mandate he had received from Sri Ramakrishna by bringing

into the existence the Math—the centre from which the spiritual tidal wave to deluge the world with spiritual wisdom and the spirit of religious harmony will emanate, a haven for the all-renouncing monks and brahma-charins, and a place of solace for the devotees of God irrespective of caste, colour, creed, sex or nationality. Even as one enters the precincts of Belur Math, many memories of the early days surface before the mind's eye revealing the sanctity of the place. The best way to utilize such an atmosphere is by fulfilling the purpose for which it came into being.

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4. Swami Gambhirananda, *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1977).
5. Swami Someswarananda, 'Early Days of Belur Math', *Prabuddha Bharata*, 1981, pp. 104–15. See also pp. 183–7.
6. *Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Sister Nivedita Girls' School, 1967), vol. 2, p. 411; *The Brahmavadin*, 16 March 1898, p. 530.
7. Swami Prabhananda, 'Early History of the Ramakrishna Sangha', *Prabuddha Bharata*, 1986, pp. 573–93.

Through the realization of the identity of Brahman and the soul, resulting from such great dicta as 'Thou art That', do away with thy superimposition with a view to strengthening thy identification with Brahman.

Until the identification with the body is completely rooted out, do away with thy superimposition with watchfulness and a concentrated mind.

—*Vivekacūdāmaṇi*, śloka 283–4.

A Hymn to the Divinity of Sri Ramakrishna

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

This is a translation of a poem in Bengali composed by Swami Vivekananda in 1898, a hundred years ago.

We salute Thee!
Lord! Adored of the world,
Samsara's bondage breaker, taintless Thou,
Embodiment of blessed qualities,
Thou transcendest all Gunas; human form
Thus bearest.
Thee we salute and adore!
Refuge of mind and speech, Thou art
beyond
The reach of either. Radiance art Thou
In all radiance that is. The heart's cave
Is by Thy visitance resplendent made.
Verily Thou art that which dispelleth
The densest darkness of Tamas in man.
Lo! In variety of melody
Forth-breaking in fine harmony most sweet,
Hymns of Thy devotees, accompanied
By Mridanga playing with music's grace,
Fill the air, in evening worship
to Thee.
One glancing vision at Thine eyes divine
Cleared by the collyrium of Jnana
Defies delusion. O Thou blotter-out
Of all the taints of sin, Intelligence
Pure, unmingled is Thy form. Of the world
Thou art embellisher. Self-luminous
Art Thou. O Ocean of feeling sublime,
And of Love Divine, O God-maddened One.
Devotees win Thy blessed feet and cross
Safely the swelling sea of Samsara.
O Lord of the world, through Thy
Yoga power

Thou shinest as the Incarnation clear
Of this our time. O Thou of strict restraint,
Only through Thine unstinted grace we see
The mind in Samadhi completely merged;
Mercy Incarnate! austere are Thy deeds.
Thou dealest to the evil of misery
Destruction. Kali's binding cords
Are cut by Thee asunder. Thine own life
Thou gavest freely, O sweet Sacrifice,
O best of men! O Saviour of the world!
Devoid wert Thou of the idea of sex,
Thought of possession charmed Thee not.
To Thee
Obnoxious was all pleasure. Give to us,
O greatest among Tyagis, love intense
Unto Thy sacred feet; give, we implore!
Fearless art Thou, and past all
gloom of doubt;
Thy mind is wrapt in its own firm resolve;
Thy lovers, whose devotion mounts above
The realm of reason, who renounce
the pride
Of caste and parentage, of name and fame—
Their safe refuge art Thou alone, O Lord!
My one true treasure is Thy blessed feet,
Reaching which the whole universe itself
Seems like a puddle in the hollow made
By hoof of passing cow.
O offering
To Love! O Seer of equality
In all! O verily, in Thee the pain
And evil of this mortal world escapes,
And vanishes, O cherished One. □

It is said that unless one is a holy man one cannot know a holy man, just as a vegetable seller cannot know the value of a diamond.... A holy man is judged according to the worth of his appraiser.

—Swami Brahmananda, *Precepts for Perfection*, p. 65.

Ecological Concerns in Hinduism

DR. SATISH K. KAPOOR

In this article the learned author brings out a wealth of information hidden in the scriptures of the Hindus which point out to a clear perception of the need for protection of one's environment.

*O Death, we pay homage to thee for saving us from the scientific weapons of the learned, from the instruments and arms of kings, and from the economic troubles created by businessmen!*¹

The prophetic note in the above hymn can be easily grasped in today's world situation when mankind faces an ecological crisis of the worst nature. Goaded by the Industrial Revolution and the developments in the field of science and technology, pressurized by mounting population and poverty, and governed by the materialistic tendency, man has converted the biosphere into a nososphere*, ignoring other units of creation. By indiscriminately cutting down forests, by converting grasslands into areas of habitation, by levelling and tunneling mountains, by changing landscapes, destroying ecosystems, generating chemical and radioactive pollution, producing non-biodegradable matter, endangering plant and animal species, dumping lakes, rivers and oceans with sewage and industrial wastes, man has disturbed the balance of nature and created conditions which, if not altered for the better, can prove to be disastrous for humanity.

Marching on the developmental path, he forgot the consanguinity between all living matter, between material and moral concerns, and went on to pillage and plunder natural resources without caring in the least whether these were renewable as quickly as they were being depleted or non-renewable. Besides, he failed to understand that his fulfilment lay in the realization of his own Self which was coterminous with the Cosmos, and that the harm done to any sentient or insentient being or an interference with the processes of nature was sure to boomerang on him.

The fact that life in all its varied forms and manifestations is interdependent and interrelated was emphasized by the Vedic ṛsis centuries before ecological problems became a matter of serious concern for humanity. Sages and seers who lived in close communion with nature were aware that the disturbance in the biological equilibrium between different organisms and their environment was sure to affect the quality of life, or may even destroy it. They sensed the rhythmic flow of energy in every object of nature—in heavenly bodies, rivers, oceans, plants, animals, birds and insects—, and stressed the need for the preservation of life which, in its various moulds and aspects, emanated from the same *Reality*. From the fundamental premise of the oneness of existence ensued a *reverential attitude* towards the objects of nature and a *holistic view* of life and progress which reflect through Hindu *dharma*.

1. *Atharvaveda*, Book VI, Hymn XIII.1. [Hereafter, AV.]

नमो देववधेभ्यो नमो राजवधेभ्यः।

अथो ये विश्वानां वधास्तेभ्यो नमोऽस्तु ते॥

See Devi Chand, *The Atharvaveda*, Sanskrit text with English translation (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1982), p. 218.

* Noso, used in the formation of compound words, means disease.—Ed.

Rta and Satya

The Vedic seers spoke of the Cosmic Order (*Rta*) which was rooted in the changeless *Reality*. At its bidding the wheel of time moved, celestial bodies marched on their determined course—the sun and the stars shone in the sky, the moon reflected the sun's rays, the earth spun on its axis, water flowed, air blew, fire emitted heat and light, seasons revolved, eclipses occurred, and days and nights followed each other in an unending cycle. All the devas (gods)—*Agni*, *Sūrya*, *Brhaspati*, *Uṣas*, *Maruts*, and others have their origin in *Rta*.² Since the Vedic sages were enraptured by the grandeur of the physical phenomena, they crystallized Nature-images into human forms and invested them with divine attributes thereby bringing nature closer to man. Heaven and earth were, and still are, regarded as father and mother not only of terrestrial creatures but also of gods.³ The Sun is the pure and lovely face of *Rta*.⁴ The Dawn is daughter of the sky who appears on her golden chariot in embroidered garments from a set point in *Rta* to awaken one and all.⁵ *Agni* (Fire) is the ruler of sacrifices—an invoking priest—who invites the gods to partake of offerings.⁶ The Wind is the 'breath of the gods and the life-germ of the Universe'.⁷

Rta (Cosmic Order) and *Satya* (Truth) are twins as they emerged out of *tapas* (blaz-

ing spiritual fire) in the beginning of creation.⁸ Together they uphold the heavens and the earth. *Rta* is the manifest form of the Cosmos; *Satya*, the inherent principle of *Rta* and *Dharma* (in the sense of righteousness) is the ideal order in the human world. The absence of *Rta* or *Satya* brings about chaos and disorder. It is the infringement of the Moral Law—the disturbance of equilibrium between various elements in nature by man—which has caused the ecological crisis.

Mother Earth

The earth is conducive to the welfare of man if he adheres to Cosmic Laws, says the *Rgveda*.⁹ The judicious use of oceans, forests and atmosphere, the key components of the earth's environment, is the *sine qua non* for preserving its ecosystem and saving life from being undermined. In *Bhūmi Sūkta* (Hymn to the Earth) which runs into sixty-three verses¹⁰, the Vedic ṛṣi prays:

Whatever I dig up of you, O Earth,
may you of that have quick
replenishment!
O Purifying One, may my thrust
never reach right unto your vital points,
your heart.¹¹
May your dwellings, O Earth,
free from sickness and wasting,
flourish for us!
Through a long life watchful,
may we always offer to you our tribute.¹²
The Earth having gentle slopes, plains,

2. *Rgveda*, I.189.6; IV.40.5; II.23.15; I.113.12; III.54.13. [Hereafter, RV.]

3. RV., I.160.5; VI.70.2,5,6.

4. RV., VI.51.1.

5. RV., V.80.6; III.61.2; IV.51.8; I.124.4; I.92.4.

6. RV., III.9.9; I.1.1.

7. RV., X.168.4.

For different interpretations of *Rta* see B.B. Chaubey, *Treatment of Nature in Rgveda* (Hoshiarpur: Vedic Sahitya Sadan, 1970), pp. 13–15; A.C. Bose, *The Call of the Vedas* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1970), pp. 43–57.

8. RV., X.168.4.

9. I.90.6–8.

10. AV., XII.1.

11. AV., XII.1.35.

यत् ते भूमे विश्वनाभि क्षिप्रं तदपि रोहतु।

मा ते मर्म विभृग्वरी मा ते हृदयमर्पिपम्॥

Raimundo Panikkar's translation, *The Vedic Experience: Mantramāñjarī* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1977), p. 126.

12. AV., III.1.62.

(p.t.o.)

mountain-peaks, forests, deserts, lakes, rivers, oceans, rocks, plants and animals is the Mother of all finite beings, the bearer of treasures, the source of food, and the abode of men both foolish and wise, (*Bhūmi Sūkta*). Squandering the Earth's resources, destroying plant and animal life or pilfering with environmental conditions is thus ignoble and contemptible. The Vedic sages prayed for peace and harmony not only between man and man, or man and other forms of life, man and earth, but also between the earth and the other primordial elements of the Cosmos. Peace being the key to progress and development and the essential requisite of a happy life, the *Śānti Mantra* is recited towards the beginning or the end of all sacred Hindu rites and ceremonies to establish a force-field of peaceful energy in the environment.

*To the heavens be peace,
to the sky and the earth,
To the waters be peace,
to plants and all trees,
To the Gods be peace,
to Brahman be peace,
To all men be peace,
again and again
—peace also to me.*¹³

To the Hindus, Earth is not an object for exploitation, but a Mother for adoration. The tradition of worshipping it (*Bhūmi Pūjā*) before using it in any manner continues to this

day. The Sun being the principal source of light and energy for all forms of life on the Earth is also adored in many ways: as a manifest god (*prakāṣa devatā*) at dawn; as the deity *Sūrya Nārāyaṇa* in temples; as the vibrant expression of the Absolute by the Saura cultists; as the Cosmic ripener during harvest festivals, and, as the syllable *ha* (co-terminous with the syllable *tha* representing the Moon) in Hatha Yoga which concretises worship into twelve physical postures (*Sūrya Namaskāra*). The Sun, like Water, figures prominently in the Hindu *Cikitsā paddhati* (medical treatment); its rays are believed to cure the diseases of the nervous and the circulatory systems.¹⁴

Rivers, Seas and Oceans

The Hindus do not regard rivers and seas just as vast sheets of water but as embodying the primeval element of nature which purifies and vitalizes everything that comes into its contact. Says a *Rgvedic* prayer¹⁵:

*Whatever sin is found in me
Whatever wrong I may have done
If I have lied or falsely sworn
Waters, remove it far from me.*

The Ganges, amongst all the rivers, is considered the most sacred not simply because of its socio-economic importance or mythical richness, but because during the course of its journey from the Himalayas it passes through such herbs and minerals which give it curative properties. It has remained a symbol of culture and of purity despite pollution; its banks provide venues

उपस्थास्ते अनभीवा अयक्ष्मा अस्मभ्यं सन्तु
पृथिवी प्रसूताः। (p.t.o.)
दीर्घं न आयुः प्रतिबुध्यमाना वयं
तुभ्यं बलिहतः स्याम॥
Ibid., p. 129.

13. *Yajurveda*, XXXVI.17. [Hereafter, YV.]
द्यौः शान्तिरन्तरिक्षं शान्तिः पृथिवी शान्तिरापः
शान्तिरोषधयः शान्तिः। वनस्पतयः शान्तिर्विश्वे
देवाः शान्तिर्ब्रह्म शान्तिः सर्वं शान्तिः शान्तिरेव
शान्तिः सा मा शान्तिरेधि॥
Ibid., p. 306.

14. For this aspect see *Kalyāṇa: Sūrya Ank* (Gorakhpur: Gita Press, January 1979).

15. X.9.8.

इदमापः प्र वहत यत्किं च दुरितं मयि।
यद्वाहमभिदुद्रोह यद्वा शेष उतानृतम्॥

Raimundo Panikkar's translation, op. cit. p. 120.

for purificatory rites, and its water, deemed as an elixir, is preserved in every Hindu home.

Mountains

Mountains with snow-clad peaks, forests, woodlands, streams and various species of birds and animals form important ecosystems which deserve to be kept intact. From ancient times, the Hindus have looked at mountains with awe and reverence considering them to be the abode of gods and goddesses. Being away from the humdrum of life, they are fit places for the holy shrines or spiritual retreats. As one moves upward into these silent zones of nature, the gravitational pull of the earth on the body decreases helping one, as it were, to take a jump from the material to the spiritual plane.

Time and Rāga

Nature pervades the Hindu way of life in ways more than one. The fact that celestial bodies have a bearing on human affairs and terrestrial events is recognized by all. Auspicious time (*śubha muhūrta*) for every important venture is determined by relating planetary movements to life on earth. *Pūrṇimā* (Full-moon night), *Amāvāsyā* (New-moon night), *Ekādaśī* (11th day of each lunar fortnight), solstices or eclipses provide occasions for holy acts which lead to self development. *Āyurvedic* medicines, specially for asthma, piles and epilepsy are kept exposed to the rays of the moon for a number of nights before being put to use. Herbs like *Apāmarga* (*Achyranthes aspera*) are taken out for Tantric practices only on *Amāvāsyā*. Some Hindu festivals are related to the change of seasons (viz. *Vasanta Pañcamī* or *Śrāvaṇi Pūrṇimā*).

Musical *rāgas* too have their appropriate timings: *Hillola*, *Lalitā* and *Vasanta* are spring *rāgas* to be sung at dawn or midnight; *Megha* and *Yamini* are *rāgas* for the rainy season sung at dawn and in the afternoon

respectively; *Vibhāsa* and *Śrī Rāga* are autumn *rāgas* to be sung in the afternoon; *Pūrvi* and *Mālkos* are winter *rāgas* sung in the evening and at night respectively; *Bhairava* and *Pillu* are summer *rāgas* to be sung at dawn and at night respectively. This is how the Hindu establishes his link with nature in its various moods and manifestations.

Plants

Plants, being nature's major processors of solar energy which is vital for existence, have been worshipped by Hindus with a sense of gratitude. The fact that they have life was known to them centuries before it was scientifically proved by Dr. J. C. Bose. They drew from them what was most essential for sustenance—flowers, fruits, timber, fuel, medicines, etc. The Vedic sages spoke highly of *aśvattha* (*Ficus religiosa*), *gūlar* (*Ficus glomerata*), *nyāgarodha* (*Ficus indica*), *apāmarga* (*Achyranthes aspera*), *dūrvā* grass, *śatavarī* (*Adds kendars*), *neem* (*Azadirachta indica*), *śamī* (*Ficus benjamina*), *aśoka* (*Saraca indica*), *tulasī* (*Ocimum sanctum*) and other useful plants. Due to their efficacious properties some plants continue to be used in social and religious ceremonies of Hindus and are deified in a manner which may be incomprehensible even to a devotee. Thus, a Vaiṣṇava may not realize that by performing the daily ritual of offering water to the Holy Basil, he is, in fact, nourishing the plant; that when he adorns it with a *dupattā* (a piece of thin cloth) in *Kārttika* (October–November), commemorating its marriage with the Lord Viṣṇu, he is protecting the plant during chilly weather; or that when he breaks his fast with a *tulasī* leaf early in the morning, he is insuring himself against a number of infectious diseases.

The day, time, month or occasion of worship of plants has a mythical, astrological or utilitarian basis. *Amala* (*Phyllanthus emblica*) is worshipped on *Akṣaya Navamī*, the ninth day of the bright half of *Kārttika*; *aśvat-*

tha on Sundays but in a special way on *Somavati Amāvāsyā* (falling on the fifteenth day of the dark half of any month which occurs on a Monday); *apāmarga* on every Saturday, specially in *Kārttika*; *bel* (*Aegle marmelos*) and *gūlar* in *Śrāvaṇa* (July–August); *kadamba* (*Anthecephalous cadamba*) in *Āṣāḍha* (June–July); *Śamī* in *Āśvina* (September–October), and so on.

The mythical association of plants with Hindu gods and goddesses is of great significance as it evokes a feeling of veneration among the devout. *Bel* and *Rudrākṣa* (*Elaeocarpus sp.*); are dear to Lord Śiva; *tulasī* and *Sala* (*Shorea robusta*) to Lord Viṣṇu; *apāmarga* to Lord Gaṇeśa; lotus to Lord Viṣṇu and goddess Lakṣmī; *kadamba* to Lord Kṛṣṇa; *samī* to Hanuman, and *candana* (sandalwood) and *pārijāta* (*Nyctanthes arbror-tristis*) to Lord Indra.

Cutting down trees was prohibited in India as early as during the period of Mauryas (324 or 321 BCE to 183 or 185 BCE). Kautilya laid down that those who tore off even the minor branches or tender sprouts of trees yielding fruits and flowers for providing shade in parks or places of pilgrimage, for forest-dwellings of hermits or for cremation or for burial, should be fined.¹⁶ In ancient India, people offered prayers and performed other holy rites to expiate themselves from the crime of uprooting a holy tree. Plucking a leaf, fruit or flower at night is a taboo in Hinduism as it is traditionally believed that plants are then in a restful state.

Animal Life

Adhering to the principle of shared membership of all living organisms, the Hindus, like the Jainas and the Buddhists,

have always valued their relationship with the animal kingdom. Vegetarianism, a key concept in Indian religions, rests on the praxis that *all* life is sacred, and that each living species has as much right to exist on earth as man, life being an organic unity. A Vedic prayer says¹⁷:

*May all beings look on me with the
eyes of a friend;*

*May I look on all beings with the
eyes of a friend;*

*May we look on one another with the
eyes of a friend.*

Zoolatry, worship of animals or paying attention to them, formed an important part of the religious beliefs of the Indus Valley people as evidenced by the representations of animals on seals and figurines discovered at Harappa, Mohenjodaro and other sites. The Vedic Aryans showed great compassion towards animals and chanted prayers so that their tribe may increase. The Cow, in particular, was regarded as the most sacred, and is still considered so, due to a number of reasons, both religious and socio-economic. Many Vedic hymns prohibit the killing of cows.¹⁸ She is Aditi¹⁹, the embodiment of a Ṛgvedic goddess who supports the universe; her milk and products made from it are wholesome and nourishing; her urine can cure a number of diseases like sciatica, dropsy, jaundice, epilepsy, eczema, etc. for which it is taken on an empty stomach; her dung has disinfecting properties and is still used for plastering the floor; fumes of cow dung cakes are inhaled in lung-infection; *pañca-gavya*, a mixture of cow's milk, curd, ghee, urine and dung, is consumed during

17. YV., XXXVIII.18.

मित्रस्य मा चक्षुषा सर्वाणि भूतानि समीक्षन्ताम्।

मित्रस्याहं चक्षुषा सर्वाणि भूतानि समीक्षे।

मित्रस्य चक्षुषा समीक्षामहे॥

18. RV., VIII.101.15; AV., XIII.4.38,53; 5.36.

19. RV., VIII.101.15.

16. Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra*, Trans. R. Shamasastri (Mysore: Mysore Printing and Publishing House, 1967), ch. XIII, p. 234.

religious rites and also used as medicine to have a cleansing effect on the mind and the body.²⁰

Birds and Animals—Conservation

Keeping in mind the value of birds in preserving the balance of nature, the Dharmaśāstras forbid people to eat the flesh of cock, heron, sparrow, crow, cuckoo, osprey, pigeon, dove, vagtail, vulture, crane, peacock, *cakravaka*, flying fox, parrot, falcon, swan, woodpecker, *maina*, *lakṣamana* (*Ardea sibirica*) and *tittibha* (*Parra jacana*). The sutras (particularly, Kauśika, Mānava and Gobhila) also prescribe a number of rituals and ceremonies for the wellbeing of bovine animals.²¹ Kautilya laid down stringent punishments for those who derived sadistic pleasure by harming or injuring animals.²² King Aśoka (273–232 BCE) not only stopped the killing of animals but also opened veterinary hospitals in the true spirit of *Dharma* or Law of Piety.

The fact that animals were not just flesh and bone with a beak or a tail but possessed intelligence and a mind of their own, was well brought out by Viṣṇu Śarmā in *Pañcatantra* (c. 200 BCE). Suśruta (4th century CE), father of surgery, was so convinced of the extrasensory perception of some birds and animals that he advised kings to keep them as pets with a view to safeguarding himself from the danger of being poisoned.²³

Hindu mythology, folklore and literature bring out the affinity of many Hindu gods and goddesses with birds and animals who also act as their *vāhanas* (vehicles). Lord Viṣṇu rides on the eagle; Lord Śiva on his white bull, Nandi; Goddess Sarasvatī on a swan; Kārtikeya on a peacock; Kāma on a parrot; Yama on a buffalo; Varuṇa on a crocodile, and so on. Consanguinity with and concern for birds and animals also express themselves through Hindu social and religious ceremonies. *Nṛ Yajña* and *Bhūta Yajña*—two of the five daily sacrifices enjoined on a householder by the Sūtra literature—require a compulsory offering of food to birds and animals.²⁴ *Śrāddhas* (commemorative ceremonies for the departed souls) are considered incomplete if balls of rice are not fed to the crow who is mythically believed to have been present at the time of creation, and can peep into the nether regions.²⁵ Even snakes are fed with milk and propitiated on specific days dedicated to them (*Gūgā Navami* or *Nāga Pañcamī*, for example). The *Āśvalāyana Grihyasūtra*²⁶ suggests a *mantra* before doing the act of worship on the full-moon day of *Śrāvaṇa*:

The serpents which belong to the earth, which belong to the air, which belong to the heaven, which dwell in the directions of the horizon—to them I have brought this *bali* (offering), to them I offer this *bali*.

20. *Caraka Saṁhitā*, Cikitsitāsthānam, 17–23.

21. Ram Gopal, *India of Vedic Kalpasutra* (Delhi: National Publishing House, 1959), pp. 108, 135.

22. *Kautilya's Arthśāstra*, ch. XIX, p. 224.

23. *Suśruta Saṁhitā*, Kalpasthānam, ch. I, pp. 28–33.

Seeing poisoned food, the redness of the eyes of cakora will become dim, the voice of the cuckoo will change, the *krauñca* bird will get intoxicated, the peacock will look in an-

guish, the parrot will cry loudly, the geese will make loud noise, the *bhr̥ṅgarāja* will shout, the *pr̥ṣat* deer will shed tear,...

See also Aparna Chattopadhyaya, *Studies in Ancient Indian Medicine* (published by the author herself at Varanasi, 1993), pp. 70–2.

24. For this aspect see Ram Gopal, *op. cit.*, pp. 390–3.

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 369–76.

26. II.1.9.

Ibid., pp. 469–70.

Some of the traditional remedies for the accomplishment of desired goals, warding off the effect of an evil eye, or coping with psychological stress are: feeding balls of wheat flour to cows; milk or *capāti* (hand-made bread) to a black-coloured dog; food grains to sparrows; seeds of *mālakaṅgaṇī* (*Penicum miliaceum*) to pigeons; rice or sesame seeds to ants or to other hymenopterous insects, etc.

Veterinary science which existed in seed form in the *Atharvaveda* was highly developed in ancient India.²⁷ Specialized treatises providing medical knowledge about birds and animals coexisted with the works dealing with the ailments of human beings; they were attributed a divine origin and founded on the *tridoṣa* [theory of *vāta* (air), *pitta* (bile) and *kapha* (phlegm)] which is at the root of Indian medical system. *Gavāyurveda* dealt with the bovine species; *Aśvāyurveda* with horses; *Hastyaayurveda* with elephants and *Śyenāyurveda* with hawks. Śalihotra, father of veterinary science, composed 12,000 verses on horses in his treatise variously known as *Hayāyurveda*, *Turaṅgama Śāstra* or *Śalihotra Saṁhitā*, which have been translated into Persian, Arabic, Tibetan and English. Likewise, *Pālakāpya Saṁhitā*, having more than 10,000 verses (neatly divided into four sections and one hundred and fifty-two chapters), deals only with elephants. Medical texts also existed on goats, sheep, camels, donkeys and some other animals. *Caraka Saṁhitā* dilates on veterinary science in a general manner.²⁸ Such was the importance accorded to animal life that the sage Parāśara laid down rules and conditions for the expiation of crimes against animals.²⁹

27. See, for example, *Atharvaveda*, Book I, Hymn XXX.3; Book VI, Hymn LIX.1–3.

28. *Siddhisthānam*, 19–26.

29. *The Caraka Saṁhitā*, vol. I (Jamnagar: Shree Gulabkunverba Ayurvedic Society, 1949), pp. 292–7.

Man in Relation to the Cosmos

Man, the key figure in the ecological cycle, has 'the insentient mind of inanimate beings', the vitalic mind of the plant kingdom, the conscious mind of the animal kingdom, besides having his own self-conscious identity which yearns for progress and development.³⁰ He is a microscopic manifestation of the universe having in him all the five elements which constitute the latter (*Pañcabhūta*). The earth provides his body with strength, steadiness, heaviness and hardness; water (*āpas*) with viscosity, viscidness, softness, smoothness and odour; fire (*tejas*) with heat, glow and vision; air (*vāyu*) with dryness, transparency and tactility, and, ether (*ākāśa*) with olfaction, porosity and agility. The eye has the elementary principle of fire, ear that of ether, nose that of the earth, tongue that of water, and skin that of air.³¹ The *tridoṣa* (air, bile and phlegm) in fact denote the three balancing forces of nature which derive from the *pañcabhūta*, and then give birth to and sustain the human body 'established in the lower, the middle and the upper regions'.³² The combination of air and ether leads to *vāta*; of fire and earth to *pitta*, and, earth and water to *kapha*. Any disharmony or change in the proportion, quality or action of these causative factors is detrimental to the human body.³³ The *tridoṣa* are linked to *guṇas*—*sattva* (quality of goodness and purity), *rajas* (quality of action) and *tamas* (quality of ignorance, inertia or dark-

30. Benjamin Walker, *Encyclopedia of Esoteric Man* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 175.

31. *Suśruta Saṁhitā*, Śarīrasthānam, I.20–1. For Caraka's view of man, see *Caraka Saṁhitā*, Śarīrasthānam, I.27–30, 35.

32. *Suśruta Saṁhitā*, Sūtrasthānam, XXI.3.

33. For details on *tridoṣa*, see *The Caraka Saṁhitā*, vol. 1, op. cit., pp. 513–77; Chandrasekhar G. Thakur, *Introduction to Āyurveda* (Bombay: The Times of India Press, 1965), pp. 36–52; G.P. Dubey, 'The Physiological Concepts in

ness) which reflect a person's nature in terms of their proportion in his mental body.³⁴ *Sapta Dhātus* or seven essential constituents of the physical body also relate to primal elements: water is predominant in *rasa* (food-juice), fire in *rakta* (blood), earth in *māṁsa* (flesh), water and earth in *meda* (fat), earth and air in *asthi* (bone), and, water in *majjā* (marrow) and *śukra* (semen).³⁵ The seven *cakras* in the *liṅga śarīra* (subtle body)—*mūlādhāra*, *svādhiṣṭhāna*, *maṇipūra*, *anāhata*, *viśuddha*, *ājñā*, and *sahasrāra*—with corresponding nerve plexus, ganglia and glands situated along the spinal cord from the base to the cranial chamber in the physical body constitute the centre of consciousness from where life-current spreads to each cell.³⁶ These are, in turn, connected with the Cosmic energy which is present in varying degrees all over the universe.

*Man is thus the Cosmos in miniature. 'To understand him is to understand the world for he is similar to the world in his construction', says Caraka.*³⁷ Just as a blanket of gases surrounds the earth, five vital airs described in the works on Āyurveda and Tan-

tra as *prāṇa* (in the heart), *apāna* (in the abdomen), *vyāna* (in the whole body), *samāna* (in the umbilical region) and *udāna* (in the throat) regulate the inner functions of the body.³⁸ The factor of heat which provides sustenance to living beings in the outside world has its counterpart in the thirteen types of *agnis* which operate inside the human body (seven *dhātu agnis*, five *bhūta agnis* and *jāṭharāgni* which is at the base of them all).³⁹

Like the earth's surface, the human body consists mostly of water and is affected by tides, seasons and other exogenous processes of nature. It contains nearly every mineral and chemical which exist on the earth. Lunar and solar energies pervade the body through the key channels described in yoga parlance as *Idā* and *Piṅgalā* extending from the end of the spine to the left and right nostrils respectively. The expanse of man's mind is as vast as that of the sky or as deep as that of the ocean; the flight of his thoughts and imagination, swifter than the very air. Seismic movements take place in his mind as they do outside; his moods and actions appear to be as diverse as the objects of nature. He undergoes an eclipse when some unfavourable development stands between his hope and fulfilment. Given a stimulus, the ingenious stuff in him bursts out like a volcano taking the form of anger. He is the epitome of intelligence which is eternally present in nature. Scientific gadgets and appliances like camera, calculator, taperecorder, computer, X-ray machines are only the material manifestations of his mental power by which man can gather, record, classify, compute, store or reproduce events or facts at will.

38. *Caraka Saṁhitā*, *Cikitsitāsthānam*, XXVIII.5–10. Five auxiliary airs of the body are: *Nāga*, *kurma*, *kṛkara*, *devadatta* and *dhanañjaya*.

39. *Ibid.*, XV.13–15.

Indian Medicine' in K.N. Udupa and R.H. Singh, *Science and Philosophy of Indian Medicine* (Nagpur: Shree Baidyanath Ayurved Bhawan, 1978), pp. 49–67; see also scattered references to the subject in the Silver Jubilee Commemoration Volumes of Ayurveda Mahamandala, Pune, vol. I, 1935; vol. II, 1936.

34. *Caraka Saṁhitā*, *Śarīrasthānam*, IV.36–7. For further subdivision of *guṇas* see *Suśruta Saṁhitā*, *Śarīrasthānam*, I.18.

35. *Aṣṭāṅga Saṁgraha*, sutra 8.12; *Caraka Saṁhitā*, *Cikitsitāsthānam*, XV.16.

36. *Mūlādhāra* is situated at the base of the spine; *svādhiṣṭhāna* at the root of the sex organ; *maṇipūra* at the naval region; *anāhata* at the heart region; *viśuddha* corresponds, in the physical body, to the thyroid gland, and *ājñā* to the pineal gland.

37. *Śarīrasthānam*, V.3.

Nature—Internal and External

Nature is both inside and outside man: Inner nature derives from the characteristics of outer nature and outer nature is affected by the mechanism and working of the inner. Both need to be at the same wavelength if harmony is to be achieved between oneself and the environment for total peace, progress and development.

Environment thus need not be viewed in its external aspect alone as the sum total of surrounding things, conditions or influences that impinge on the physical world; the inner mental or psychic environment of a person influenced by hereditary factors, past impressions, proclivities, potentialities, prejudices, interests, ideals, aspirations, thoughts, etc. plays a vital role in determining his developmental goals and the means to achieve them. Since man has infinite possibilities for good or for evil, he may attain to Buddhahood or to Mephistophilian depths depending on his inner environment. While the physical environment becomes polluted by abnormal changes in the chemical and biological characteristics of air, water or earth, the inner environment of a person becomes impure by six major vicious tendencies enumerated in the Hindu sacred texts as *kāma* (lust), *krodha* (anger), *lobha* (greed), *moha* (false attachment), *mātsarya* (jealousy) and *ahamkāra* (vanity).⁴⁰ Lust for power and pelf, for the opposite sex or for money smoulder the embers of conflicts and tensions both within a person and in society (*kāma*). Violence in the world—at home, in society or among nations—projects violence within man (*krodha*). Corruption is the outward manifestation of acquisitive tendency (*lobha*). Excessive attachment to money, to members of the family or to something else makes one undergo many an agonizing phase in life (*moha*). Negative thoughts and actions are the outcome of

jealousy (*mātsarya*), and vanity (*ahamkāra*) makes one a hypocrite or a maniac.

Hindu Rites

Ancient Hindus recognized the subtle role of smell in altering mental environment. The olfactory receptors are known to respond to odours whether spicy, burnt, resinous, flowery, fruity or putrid, and elicit pleasant or unpleasant response. While the foul smell spoils one's mood and causes irritability and nausea, sweet smell induces pleasant emotions, and at times, an attitudinal change in a person.⁴¹ The *raison d'être* of lighting *dhoop* or *agarbatti* (incense sticks), or the use of sweet-smelling materials like *agaru* (*Aquilaria agallocha*) or *candana* (sandalwood) in puja rites—the Āgamic counterpart of *yajña*—is to sanctify the environment so that the worshipper is in total harmony with his object of veneration. Flowers expressing the language of human sensibility are also used in social and religious ceremonies both for adding charm to environment and for making it fragrant. In fact, no Hindu ritual, prayer or sacrifice is complete without them. Flowers of *kaner* (*Nerium indicum*) and *arka* (*Calotropis gigantea*) are specially offered to the Sun god; of *bakul* (*Mimusops elengi*), *mandar* (*Erythrina stricta*) and *singhāḍa* (*Trapa bispinosa*) to Lord Viṣṇu; of marigold to goddess Bhagavatī; of *cameli* (*Jasminum*) and *kātuśa* (*Castanopsis*) to Lakṣmī; of *dhatūra* and *kanera* to Lord Śiva, in accordance with the injunctions in the *Purāṇas* and other sacred texts.⁴² The daily use of fresh flowers or flower garlands for mental vigour was recognized by Caraka and Suśruta. Both recommended sleeping on a flower bed, swimming in tanks with lotus in them, and dining

40. AV., hymn XVI.6.

41. See Floyd L. Ruch, *Psychology and Life* (Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala & Co., 1970), pp. 289–90.

42. Majpuria and Joshi, *Religious and Useful Plants of Nepal and India* (Lashkar, Gwalior: M. Gupta, 1989). See relevant portions.

and drinking on a flower-bedecked table to blot out stress or depression, titillate the libido or to be with nature's finest expression.⁴³

The virtue of *Agnihotra*, the Vedic way of cleansing the atmosphere and boosting *prāṇa* or life-energy by fumigating clarified butter, grains, medicinal substances, cowdung cakes and wood (preferably *can-dana*, *plasa* and mango trees) amidst the chanting of *mantras*, have come to be universally recognized by chemists and horticulturists. Based on the biorhythms of nature, 'it activates the subtle interplay of energy currents in the biosphere and has a therapeutic effect on the mind'.⁴⁴ *Agnihotra* is performed twice a day when day and night meet in consonance with the circadian biological cycles recurring at approximately twenty-four-hour intervals, which bring about a magnetic change in the human body. Vasant V. Paranjpe says in this context:⁴⁵

At sunrise the many fires, electricities, ethers and more subtle energies emanating from the sun extend all the way to the earth and produce a flood effect at those coordinates where the sun is said to rise.

43. *Suśruta Saṁhitā*, Uttaratantram, LXIV.14, 44; XLVII, 55–6; *Caraka Saṁhitā*, Cikitsitāsthānam, XXIV.11–13.

44. Raghavendra Rao, 'Agnihotra: Is It An Answer to Our Present-day Ills', *Mirror*, January 1985.

See also H.L. Sood, *The Sandhyā or the Song of the Soul* (New Delhi: Lal Devi, Devi Dayal Chandhok, n.d.).

For the ritual aspect of *Agnihotra* in Vedic Kalpasutras, see Ram Gopal, op. cit., pp. 388–90; For Swami Dayananda's observations, see *The Light of Truth*, English version of *Satyārtha Prakāśa*, trans. Ganga Prasad Upadhyaya (Allahabad: The Kala Press, 1956), pp. 62–6.

45. Cited in Raghavendra Rao, op. cit.

It is awesome. The flood enlivens and purifies everything in its path, destroying what is impure in its wake. This torrent of life-sustaining energies causes all life to rejoice. At sunrise that music can be heard. The morning *Agnihotra mantra* is the essence of that music. It is the quintessential sound of that flood. At sunset, the flood recedes.

Scientific researches undertaken both in India and the West reveal that *Agnihotra* fumes reduce the microbial count by 91.4% where the sacrificial fire is lit, increase the Eloptic energy in the atmosphere, reduce the zone of haemolysis in blood sugar plates exposed to it, 'make an impact on clouds or rain water in removing the acid base', cure depression migraine and many other diseases and act as a catalyst on plant metabolism. *Agnihotra*-ash is also used as a panacea for many ills—its application or oral use can cure skin fungus, non-healing wounds, kidney pain, gastritis, tonsillitis and many other diseases according to Monica Jehle, a German pharmacist.⁴⁶ The findings echo and reconfirm the wisdom of Indian sages who turned *Agnihotra* into a sacred ritual by making it a part of the *pañcamahāyajña* to be performed daily by a householder. These include besides *Agnihotra*, *Deva Yajña* (meditation on Gods), *Ṛṣi Yajña* (study of scriptures), *Pitr Yajña* (service to departed ancestors), *Bhūta Yajña* (making offerings of food to animals and invisible beings) and *Nṛ Yajña* (feeding guests, wandering ascetics or those in penury).⁴⁷ Different types of *havana-kunḍas* are prescribed for lighting the holy

46. Ibid. See also 'Yajñopavīthy kā jñāna vijñāna pakṣa', *Akhanda Jyoti* (Hindi monthly journal founded by Late Pt. Śrī Rāma Ācārya of Śānti Kuñja, Hardwar), May 1993.

47. Cf. *The Bhagavad Gītā*, IV. 24–30; X.25. It mentions as many as fourteen kinds of sacrifices: *dravya yajña* (offering of money, food, clothes, etc. for charity); *deva yajña* (sacrifices

fire and a variety of medicinal substances used as oblation for generating, controlling and disseminating *yājñic* energy for different purposes.⁴⁸ The tradition of giving *Agnihotra*-ash as *prasād* to the devout continues to this day; the best kind of it is known in yogic parlance as *sapta svāhā* or a mixture of seven ashes (mostly made up of wood or twigs of the holy basil, *pīpal*, *neem*, *vaṭa*, *śisāma*, *apāmarga* and *āk*).

Agnihotra, which the ignorant describe as 'the most wasteful burning of endless quantities of clarified butter and wood'⁴⁹ may greatly help in solving world's food problem. Dr. B.G. Bhujbal, who conducted experiments on *Agnihotra* in a rural grape farm in Maharashtra, discovered that 'the seeds germinated in twenty-one days instead of the normal six months' when exposed to '*Agnihotra* atmosphere'. *Homa*-farming or 'the Vedic way of farming or gardening purely by an organic method which is subtly activated by *yajña*' is gaining vast popularity in the United States, Chile, Germany and Poland. Sometime back the German government officially allowed the

performance of *Agnihotra* to save the Black Forest from pollution and acid rain.⁵⁰

Conclusion

Mankind will have to return to nature's bosom and partake of its bounties in the manner of a child who lovingly and gracefully gets the best of its mother. Development is not just a matter of the fulfilment of economic goals but the total growth of all aspects of human life in their organic unity. Ecology and development can blend if man realizes that he is a part of nature's mechanism, and that his destiny lies not in degrading its resources but in making a judicious use of them. In the light of global warming trends, rise in ocean level, heavy growth of algae in rivers and lakes, changing seasons, thinning of ozone layer and other threats to life-supporting systems, one may well ask whether what man has achieved in the name of development is worthwhile. But then should man close down factories because they emit smoke or produce waste? Stop using automobiles and aircraft because of their exhaust fumes and noise? Or put an end to developmental work because it has a destructive side? Perhaps, no. The question is not as simple as that of a choice between a car or a bullock cart, a skyscraper or a mud-house, or a toothbrush or a twig. It is rather the existential question of choosing between simplicity and profligacy, between genuine needs and artificial wants, between natural and mechanical ways of living, between progress *sans* ecological balance and progress in synergetic relationship with the universe. □

50. See Raghavendra Rao's article, *op. cit.*

intended for gods); *jñāna-indriya yajña* (control of senses of perception); *viśaya yajña* (enjoying objects with certain restrictions); *svādhyāyajñāna yajña* (studying scriptural texts and reciting God's name); *prāṇa yajña*, *apāna yajña*, *prāṇāpāna yajña* and *antahprāṇa yajña* (relating to the control of breath as in *prāṇāyāma*); *yoga yajña* (practising the eight-fold yoga); *tapo yajña* (sacrifice by way of austerity); *japa yajña* (sacrifice by way of reciting holy syllables); *indriyaprāṇakarma yajña* (focussing the mind on the Self); *jñāna yajña* (being one with the Supreme Being through knowledge). See *Kalyāṇa Kalpatarū* (Gita Number), January 1935, pp. 57-8.

48. See *Akhanda Jyoti*, November 1992, pp. 61-4.

49. See, for example, M. Gadgil and R. Guha, *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 81.

As long as I live so long do I learn.

—Sri Ramakrishna

Vedanta and Professional Ethics

DR. ASOKE BASU

Dr. Asoke Basu of California is a professor of Sociology at California State University, Hayward, and is a member of the Vedanta Society at Berkeley. From 24 May through 28 May 1997 was held a Vedanta Retreat—A Memorial Day Retreat—at Olema. On the first day of the retreat Dr. Basu was one of those eminent persons who discussed Vedanta and Professional Ethics. What follows is a text of this interesting speech. We are grateful to Swami Aparananda of the Vedanta Society of Berkeley for sending this paper for publication in Prabuddha Bharata.

The author argues that 'modern professionals are becoming separated from ethics because the best of intentions of civil society—which had once held the promise of freedom for all men in common, and the seedlings of which Swamiji had watched being planted in the prairie soil of midwest America—has now fallen prey to material ends.' The author says that 'increasing separation between choice [purpose] and action [common good] in ethics may explain how ethics became separated from professional decision-making.' And of the role of practical Vedanta, he says that 'for the future seamless organizations which will be global in scope, but would begin with our innermost self,' practical Vedanta will prove ideal.

Prolegomenon

It seems increasingly evident that professional men and women lack viable ethical standards. Earlier in the West, modernization theorists suspected that feudal arrangements limited the moral freedom of the individual. They thought that bureaucracies had the best potential to maximize social welfare for the members of the public order. Project Modernity's original premise was, and continues to be, that 'in justice as in fairness the members of society are conceived as moral persons who cooperate together for mutual advantage.' Bureaucracy, as these modernists would surmise, was to be the workhorse for a democratic society; it was to be the primary public agent which would supply this common good. Men and women of good character were recruited and trained for civil service positions. High hopes were pinned on bureaucracy and its professional managers.

to its promise? Media news of local, national and international events seems to tell us otherwise. Nearly daily, we read, watch global accounts of bureaucratic bungling, inefficiency, and outright corruption from Australia to Zaire. The reader or viewer adroitly concludes that the endgame of bureaucracy is self-aggrandizement: bureaucrats only feather their own nest. Opinion polls indicate that citizens' trust of bureaucracy to deliver the common good has declined precipitously. It was not meant to turn out this way.

What Happened?

How did we get here? How is it that many of today's public managers demonstrate this common affection: seeking the lowest common denominator? Why does a raw ego-sense of our cultural norms undermine the ethical basis of our society?

Has the modern professional lived up

Many of us Vedantins and friends seeking self-realization live a double-life—the

spiritual Self and the material *Samsara*. The *samsara* begins as we cross the thresholds of our homes to travel to work. The veil of ignorance quickly lifts as we approach the freeway. The red flag is mentally hoisted with the following inscription: 'Enter the freeway at your own risk.' And this is just the beginning. During the remainder of our work day, we watch sustaining moral principles being diluted for the sake of political expediency. The dictum *in extremis* is gross, since most decisions are relative. No one is important. Hence the motto, 'Do what it takes to sell the product. Let the end justify the means.'

Defining Terms—Bureaucracy and Ethics

Who, then, is a professional? All kinds of work are described as 'professional' as distinct from 'amateur': we hear of professional tennis players and even professional exterminators. More precisely, though, *professions* are occupations which require extensive formal education. A professional is a person who knows a vocation, who is self-regulated in training and purpose, who claims authority but is fully willing to share power, and lastly, a professional is someone who is squarely oriented to the community of men and faith rather than self-interest. The term 'professional' signifies an obligation to serve. Professionals manage workplaces. Their norms of conduct are set by professional associations.

Practical Vedanta

I had alluded earlier to the modern public structure. I suggested, furthermore, that its most consistent form—bureaucracy—is its key social vehicle. A brief examination of the foundational tenets of modernization can help us to understand why ethical codes of conduct have declined under modern bureaucracy.

By the close of the 1700s, three revolutions had signaled the 'modern' age. The

French Revolution ended royal proprietorship and aspirations. Ordinary citizens of France deduced that King Louis had no divine claim to French soil. Nor, for that matter, did the king have any free hold upon their souls. Since human beings are by nature born free, they can consent, under the watchful guidance of God, to form a political union, a state.

The other revolution, the Industrial Revolution, sprang across the English Channel, developed by fourteen scientists from the Royal Society of Britain—of whom Isaac Newton is the most famous. Their aim was to objectify nature 'from the world of things ordered according to their ideal nature, to a world of events running in a steady mechanism of before and after' (Bronowski). While Newton's Puritan sympathies respected the individual and suspected the collective, he was mindful of the self being a witness to a much larger cosmic scheme of things and events. Newton summed up this inner search in his hefty tome, *Principia*, thus:

This Being governs all things... There are, given successive parts in duration, coexistent parts in space, but neither the one nor the other in the person of a man, or his thinking principle; and much less can they be found in the thinking substance of God. Every man, so far as he is a thing that has perception, is one and the same man during his whole life, in all and each of his organs of sense. God is the same God, always and everywhere. He is omnipresent not *virtually* only, but also *substantially*; for virtue cannot subsist without substance... Supreme God exists necessarily, and by the same necessity he exists *always* and *everywhere*.¹

The third revolution, the American Revolution, combined the universal self

1. *Principia*, pp. 544-5.

with the pragmatic self. Swami Vivekananda directly witnessed here in America the possibility of this union of the two selves—between the holy self and the material self, between the expressive self and the instrumental self. He spoke eloquently of this possibility to American citizens and wrote confidently of this to his brother monks and friends. He saw the spiritual divination of 'cosmic intelligence' arising in this century from the prairie heartland of America.

Swamiji saw that the principles of the Vedas, the Upanishads, and the *Brahma Sutras* were being operationally demonstrated in public America. He glorifies in this nation's common good of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. What is more, he favoured the *karmic* institution of bureaucracy and the *dharmaic* conduct of the professional. In this agency and with these agents, he thought, rested the best promise of seeking service to mankind. It is in the everyday work habits of America that a person can truly serve humanity (*sattwa-seva*). A person's occupation can be the talisman to pure consciousness. If the workplace is the ship and the professional code of conduct is the rudder, then the winds of consciousness would be the Brahman guiding the Ship of Life. Karma yoga would be the spirit of the self. In this important sense, dharma complements karma—the thought frees action, while action and the abstract becomes personal.

Sri Krishna informs Arjuna:

Freedom from activity is never achieved by abstaining from action. Nobody can become perfect by merely ceasing to act. In fact, nobody can ever rest from his activity even for a moment.

In a letter to his brother monk, Swamiji elaborated the practical applications of

Karma Yoga:

The dry Advaita [can] become living—poetic—in everyday life; out of hopelessly intricate mythology [can] come concrete moral forms; and out of bewildering Yogi-ism [can] come the most scientific and practical psychology—and all this must be put in a form so that a child may grasp it. That is my life's work. The Lord only knows how far I shall succeed.²

The plain truth is that Swami Vivekananda and his teacher, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, applied *Advaita Vedanta*—non-dualistic philosophy—to our modern, complex society. They thought that modern science did not weaken the revealed Truth, but in fact strengthened its spiritual logic. To quote Swamiji:

Just as the law of gravitation [Newton again] existed before its discovery, and would exist if all humanity forgot it, so is it with the laws that govern the spiritual world. The moral, ethical, and spiritual relations between soul and soul and between individual spirits and the Father of all spirits, were there before their discovery, and would remain even if we forgot them.³

Have We Forgotten Swamiji?

Today's psychological perception, that self-interest and power are the proper domains of a professional, has limited the idea of civil society. The Upanishads and Vedanta are splendidly suited to explain this convolution of the end justifying the means.

2. *Letters of Swami Vivekananda*, 3rd Edition, Calcutta, Advaita Ashrama, 1970, No.121, p. 284.

3. 'Paper on Hinduism', *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), vol. 1, p.7.

Vedanta informs us that there is no clear separation between ethics of choice (purpose) and ethics of action (common good). We Vedantins must acknowledge that *action* is the stuff from which life is constructed. It is the substance, content, that gives meaning to the inner-self. Without action, no life is possible. Without life, soul-making is not possible. It is only by *working* that each soul begins to come to terms with Brahman.

Profession can be an important way to seek Brahman. In each of us exists the divine potential upon which many *atmas* have pondered before and will continue to do so eternally. Thus, in an ethics of purpose, choice is viewed as unlimited and non-causal. Patience is virtue. Milton said it well: 'They only serve who stand and wait.'

I am not arguing here for the case of a workaholic. It is in work that each of us can view the ranges of the *gunas* and practise the art of self-realization. The means are all there, but they unfurl in stages. Human nature unfolds incrementally, just as the early morning rays of the sun glance gradually over the earth.

Our immersion in the world can benefit from the two yoga techniques, *Jnana Yoga* and *Karma Yoga*. Together they complement, inform and instruct us daily of the pragmatic aspects of everyday workplace habits.

Choice and Action

The norms of purposeful choice and an ethics of action can be put to good use in the future. We are advised by the organization experts that in the coming century in America the ethnography of the workplaces will be a seamless web of interactive organizations and their substructures. Most jobs in

postindustrial societies will be in the social service sector. Educated professionals who are universal in belief and who are trustful of cultural plurality will be called upon to lead. They will be cooperative in nature and will venture to think freely.

In this brief essay I have argued that modern professionals are becoming separated from ethics because the best of intentions of civil society—which had once held the promise of freedom for all men in common, and the seedlings of which Swamiji had watched being planted in the prairie soil of midwest America—has now fallen prey to material ends. I have further suggested that increasing separation between choice and action in ethics may explain how ethics became separated from professional decision-making.

Practical Vedanta is ideally suited for the future seamless organizations which will be global in scope, but would begin with our innermost self.

I leave for the Future Professionals of America—the Vedantins' new club—with an epigrammatic conundrum invoked by Fyodor Dostoevski in *The Brothers Karamazov*:

Judge thyself who was right—thou or he who questioned thee then? Remember the first question: its meaning, in other words, was this: 'Thou wouldst go into the world, and art going with empty hands with some promise of freedom which men in their simplicity and their natural unruliness cannot even understand...for nothing has ever been more unsupportable [sic] for men and a human society than freedom. □

Changing Attitude of Sister Nivedita Towards the British Rule in India: 1898-1901

DR. MAMATA RAY & DR. ANIL BARAN RAY

The year 1898 witnessed many significant events. One of these was the arrival of Miss Margaret Noble, an Irishwoman, on the shores of India. This article vividly pictures the change in her attitude towards the British: from one of deep loyalty to one of utter indignation and hatred. The following pages bring out in true colour what atrocities the British were perpetrating on Indians on Indian soil, and how this insight added to Nivedita's work of education another significant dimension—political mission. The authors aptly project Nivedita's belief that 'the real object behind British rule in India was to destroy the common bond that existed among the Indians.' There was the need, therefore, to re-establish the common bond by 'arousing the national consciousness that she has to save herself' through the sacrifice of the lives of her sons and daughters.

At the instance of Swami Vivekananda, Margaret Elizabeth Noble came to India in January 1898 to work for the education of women in India. Initiated as Sister Nivedita in March 1898, she underwent an intense course of training towards her Indianization under Swami Vivekananda during the summer and autumn of 1898.¹ But even as late as the beginning of May 1898, she was unswerving in her loyalty² to the British Raj of

India. However, a change in attitude soon came upon her, making her, first, disillusioned, and then utterly indignant towards the British rule in India, thereby prompting her to decide that she must work for the freedom of India. This article traces the course of this metamorphosis in Nivedita's attitude to the British rule in India during the period between 1898 and 1901.

I

Nivedita's first disenchantment with her race was in terms of the attitude of the British to the natives. This struck her first during her journey to the Himalayas with Swami Vivekananda. She saw with her own eyes how people of her own race had inflicted the most cruel insults upon Swami Vivekananda. On one occasion, while Nivedita and her two other Western colleagues, Mrs. Bull and Miss MacLeod, were

1. In the summer of 1898 Swami Vivekananda took Nivedita (along with some other Western disciples and followers such as Mrs. Ole Bull and Miss Josephine MacLeod) on a tour to the Himalayas and Kashmir for the purpose of giving her, as Nivedita writes, 'his personal training for the work he wished me to do in India'. See *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1982), vol. 1, p. 77.

2. Ibid., p. 287. During the first few months of her living in India, Sister Nivedita believed that the British rule in India was benevolent and altruistic in nature, that it gave India the stability necessary for the improvement of her material conditions and that Indians, at this stage of their social development, needed

the British, a third power, for their political peace. For details, see Anil Baran Ray, 'Swami Vivekananda and the Indianization of a Western Disciple' in *Swami Vivekananda: A Hundred Years Since Chicago*, (Belur, Howrah: Ramakrishna Math, 1994), pp. 620-34.

allowed to enter a restaurant, he was debarred. On another occasion, he and his four colleagues were ordered to leave the compartment in which his Western disciples were travelling. Lizelle Reymond observes that on both these occasions a dormant anger in Nivedita had come to life—'that forgotten anger of an Irishwoman on her guard.' She had seen the Swami [Vivekananda] endure in silence the most cruel insults on the part of the English. In the circumstances, as the true grand-daughter of Richard Hamilton, she would have flared out in anger, had not the Swami's attitude of perfect calm prevented her.³

On a third occasion Nivedita could no longer control herself and exploded in anger. The three Western women had gone to visit the Hindu quarter in a northern town in the company of a Hindu friend of the Ramakrishna Mission, when a group of little girls followed them calling them 'Memsab, Memsab.' Mrs. Bull had thrown them a handful of small coins which they were busy collecting. Suddenly, an English policeman holding a truncheon in his hand, appeared on the scene—and what an appearance! The people around were terrified in an instant and a shocked Nivedita demanded of the Englishman what business he had to be there! The Hindu friend of Nivedita was so afraid that he hurried Nivedita away, telling her that if she went on protesting like that she would not be able to move about in India at all!⁴

Nivedita's first disillusionment with the British rule in India came to her during her stay in Almora in May, 1898, when she got the information from one of the monks that the British government had the police watching Swami Vivekananda through

spies. Nivedita was so intensely perturbed over this information that she, till then, by her own assertion 'the most loyal Englishwoman',⁵ felt like revolting against the government. She said to herself that a government which wanted to 'interfere with' Swami Vivekananda must have become 'mad', and that in such a situation she should be 'the first to light up'⁶ against such a government. To her the whole episode seemed to be another instance of the *race-hatred* and *littleness* of the English rulers. 'You could not imagine', she wrote to her friend in England, 'what race-hatred means, living in England.'⁷ Then referring to the incident in the railway compartment from where Swami Vivekananda and his colleagues were ordered out, she wrote in the same letter: 'Manliness seems a barrier to nothing—three white women travelling with the Swami and other "natives" lay themselves and their friends open to horrid insults—*mais nous changerons tout cela*.'⁸

In a letter written a few days later, (5 June 1898),⁹ Nivedita looked somewhat critically towards the British rule in India. She felt that the English rulers of India were not ruling India in such a manner as to produce 'the true emotional response'¹⁰ from Indians. And they could not evoke such a response because to their 'eternal disgrace'¹¹ they never cared to make themselves familiar with the language of the provinces they were ruling. She also felt that though India was not ready for self-rule at that moment, it was 'natural'¹² for her to demand freedom

3. Lizelle Reymond, *The Dedicated*, (Madras: Samata Books, 1985), p. 118.

4. Ibid., p. 119.

5. *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, Ed. Sankari Prasad Basu, (Calcutta: Nababharat Publishers, 1982), vol. 1, p. 11. Letter dated 22 May 1898.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid., pp. 12-16.

10. Ibid., p. 14.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

from England.

Her shock and disillusionment led Nivedita to believe that something must be done to change the suspicion and hatred of the English towards Indians. While in Almora, she discussed the matter twice with Mrs. Annie Besant who, however, was not hopeful about changing the heart of the English in India. Mrs. Besant believed that efforts should rather be directed towards creating public opinion in England itself, so that there would be a change in the outlook of the prospective future administrators of India. Nivedita could not agree to this approach for she believed in the necessity of action in India itself.

News reached in the middle of September 1898 that a piece of land that the Maharaja of Kashmir wanted to donate to Swami Vivekananda for the establishment of a women's *math*-cum-cultural centre in Kashmir could not be delivered to him because the British Resident, Sir Adelbert Talbot, had vetoed the proposal. 'We all pictured it', Nivedita writes, 'as a centre of work in the future—work which should realize the great idea of "by the people, for the people, as a joy to worker and to served."'¹³ The news, therefore, came as a great shock to Nivedita. She tried desperately to persuade the British Resident. The American disciples too made representation through their Consul, but all this was not of any avail.

Nivedita now realized bitterly the ugliness of the face of the British rulers of India and the ugliness as well of the face of the Christian missionaries who 'stirred up such attacks'¹⁴ against Swamiji with the motive of depriving him of the proposed land in

Kashmir. 'How is it', Nivedita asked, 'that an Indian maharajah cannot give a brother of his own faith as estate that is his own property? How is it that a Hindu cannot work freely at home for the good of his own country?'¹⁵ Nivedita thought that it was 'mean' on the part of England to do such a thing to India and she burnt for the honour of England which suffered a 'moral betrayal' on all sides.¹⁶ All her hopes of the English in India having a change of heart with regard to India had been dashed to the ground. The happening in Kashmir was indeed the last straw on the proverbial camel's back.

II

'As for the attitude of the English'¹⁷ to the native—oh, you would blush as I do if you could see it all.'¹⁸ This observation of Nivedita is in the true classical manner of saying less to mean more. This sums up more than anything else all that Nivedita felt and had to say of the English race and the English rulers in India. The 'land-episode' in Kashmir opened Nivedita's eyes. The incident shocked her sense of justice. She wrote to her friends in England asking them to publicize the incident in England so that the English people *knew* the kind of littleness *their own men* were indulging in India. The reply she received was even more shocking to Nivedita. She was made to feel that perhaps she was wrong 'to talk of politics at all' and that she had not the ability for 'the *game* of politics'¹⁹ in India.

Previously, Nivedita had believed that her English friends living in England 'cared for *justice* first and last'.²⁰ Now, she saw that

13. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, vol. 1, p. 355.

14. *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, vol. 1, p. 21. Letter dated 2 September 1898.

15. Quoted in *The Dedicated*, p. 120.

16. *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, vol. 1, p. 21.

17. As an Irishwoman, Nivedita preferred to use the term *English* to mean the British in India.

18. *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, vol. 1, p. 24. Letter dated 18 September 1898.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 35. Letter dated 4 January 1899.

20. *Ibid.*

they cared only for staying on the 'right' side of the English government in India. She felt 'broken-hearted' about the attitude of her friends. She assured her friends who expressed their unhappiness at the 'outrageous things'²¹ she was writing to them that she was 'not going to take any violent steps' over the action of Talbot 'for the present'²² but asserted at the same time that her actions in India shall continue to be 'political' in the sense of registering protests against the injustice perpetrated by the British in India. 'Sooner or later my work will be recognized as "real politics"',²³ she asserted.

Despite her thundering, Nivedita was not involved, at this stage, in direct political actions. Her reactions, however, continued to be political. Writing to Mrs. Patterson, the American Consul's wife, who accompanied Nivedita on the tour to the Himalayas in the summer of 1898 and who was absolutely sympathetic to Swamiji receiving the plot of land from the Maharaja of Kashmir for building a women's *math*-cum-cultural centre in Kashmir, she observes that the meanness of some people of her own race led them to go to General Patterson, the husband of Mrs. Patterson, with a view to seeking his help towards dissuading his wife from becoming sympathetic any longer with the cause of Swami Vivekananda. Of the people engaged in conspiracy against Swamiji and Mrs. Patterson, Nivedita identifies, in particular, Sir Adelbert Talbot and Miss Muller.

It is necessary to point out here that Miss Muller, one of the first among the Western disciples of Swami Vivekananda, turned a *defector* towards the 'end of 1898. 'She has thrown *everything* overboard, Shri R.K.—Swami—Meditation—University of Religions—everything.... She is now a Bible

Christian of a virulent type, and tending towards millennialism',²⁴ writes Nivedita. Having given up Hinduism, Miss Muller started speaking derisively of Swami Vivekananda. Expressing her annoyance over Nivedita's reverence for Swamiji, she would curtly say to her, 'Oh, you won't love him long!'²⁵ She would not only say things against Swami Vivekananda in a vague general way but also go to the length of accusing him of deceiving her. This accusation was made with reference to the Math land that was purchased with the money received from Miss Muller. Nivedita could not take such distortion of truth and nasty baseless accusations about Swami Vivekananda lying down. She put the facts straight:

About money I replied with the definite statement that first sum bought Math land (it is well to have tangible things to show), and 2nd was refused—and so on. When the word 'deceived' was used of S [Swami] in quotation from Miss M. [Muller], I simply gave a sharp warning not to repeat it, and so on.²⁶

Miss Muller had previously agreed to contribute Rs.15 every month to help Nivedita meet educational expenses of her school in Calcutta. She would now insist that Nivedita spend this amount on her personal expenses, clothing, etc., and *not* on teaching 'of which I cannot approve'.²⁷ Nivedita, already aggrieved at the accusation made against her guru, felt also insulted at the conditional stipulation of Miss Muller that she declined to accept any financial support from Miss Muller. 'The sum was almost an insult anyway', observed Nivedita, 'and certainly it was not worthwhile, for anything so inadequate to anything like dignity, to give

24. Ibid., p. 27. Letter dated 7 December 1898.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid., pp. 31-32. Letter dated 1 January 1899.

27. Ibid., p. 39. Letter dated 9 January 1899.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

her the power to say or feel that she provides for me'.²⁸

While Nivedita had no 'illusions' about Miss Muller, she was definitely ashamed to see that Miss Muller could be so mean as to engage in a conspiracy against Mrs. Patterson for the trifling reason that she was an admirer of Swami Vivekananda. Expressing her anguish over how Miss Muller, 'with someone else', saw General Patterson, the husband of Mrs. Patterson, in his office and tried to set him off against his own wife as well as Nivedita, Nivedita writes:

Sir Adelbert Talbot has been behaving like a cad—setting people against her [Mrs. Patterson]—and I am ashamed once more to the depths—not of Sir A. who behaves doubtless after his kind but of other people.²⁹

From being merely 'ashamed' to holding a view as radical as the one quoted below was just a matter of three and a half months for Nivedita. Her metamorphosis in terms of *total* identification with India and *total* rejection of the British rule in India could be seen from the letter that she wrote to Mrs. Bull on 26 April 1899:

Do you remember how I told Swami [during the summer of 1898] that I could never fire on the English flag? I could no more identify myself with that more than I could fly. I see that England's course is not yet run here—but I shall LONG with all my heart for the day when it shall be. And I pray that I may be reincarnated to cry 'Young India' when the time comes to snatch the country's freedom from us, as the very youngest and earnest of recruits may have shouted by Mazzini's side in the days of the freedom of Italy.³⁰ The quoted observation shows in clear

terms the political evolution of Nivedita: one who was once intensely loyal to the English flag was *now* longing for the day of the departure of the British from India and was praying with all her heart for that freedom for India which, Italy, under Mazzini's leadership, had wrested from her foreign conqueror. It is noteworthy here that in thinking of India's freedom Nivedita was thinking in the same breath of Italy's struggle for freedom under Mazzini's leadership meaning thereby that India too, like Italy, would have to wrest her freedom from her foreign conquerors by armed struggle of the kind the young Italians under the revolutionary leadership of Mazzini had waged.

III

In 1899, she had the mortification of seeing a great Indian friend of hers, Professor Jagadish Chandra Bose, being subjected to what she considered to be nothing less than sheer cruelty and persecution by the British of a great scientist whose only fault lay in his meriting the attention of the world for his brilliant scientific experiments.

The anguish Nivedita felt at the 'persecution' of Dr. Bose made her revolt against the cruelty of a conquering people. The letters that Nivedita wrote in April 1899 bear eloquent testimony both to her deep affection for Bose and to her agony over the *injustice* meted out to him. Expressing her admiration for the scientific work that Bose carried on in England, she wrote: '...all those nine months that he was in England last he was working—not even a Sunday off—and at such a rate that he was absolutely unconscious of the outside world.'³¹ His *sadhana* and brilliant success in Europe notwithstanding, he, being free from vanity, did not allow his great work make a 'scrap of difference'³² in his relation to his European col-

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., p. 38.

30. Ibid., p. 126.

31. Ibid., pp. 125-26.

32. p. 119. Letter dated 19 April 1899.

leagues back home. But in the eyes of his colleagues, his 'fault' as Nivedita sarcastically put it, lay in the fact that he tried to prove to his countrymen through all that he did that *their* chances of success in experimental science are as great as any European's.³³

Referring to the sneering tone in which the English Society in Calcutta mentioned Dr. Bose's name, Nivedita writes:

I have had, even in the little English Society that I see, to say once or twice, 'This man is one of my most intimate friends' in a firm tone, when Dr. Bose's name was mentioned—not that anything was yet being said: it was the tone—and his crime lay in what?—that his name was important enough to be mentioned!³⁴

Nivedita pointedly asks, 'Why must this great soul be tortured to death? And by nothings — unmanlinesses — deliberate slights, and difficulties made without

necessity.'³⁵ Nivedita finds the ultimate reason for the persecution, torture and 'slow crucifixion'³⁶ of Bose in 'the cruelty, the cruelty, the cruelty and meanness of a conquering people'³⁷ who were *now* in her eyes nothing but 'poltroons'³⁸ and as such deserved nothing more than to be *hated*. The wheel, so far as Nivedita's attitude to the British rule in India was concerned, turned by now the full circle and a revolting Nivedita *now* declared with all the vehemence of a confirmed convert, 'I *hate* my own people'.³⁹

Having known the people of her race for what they were, Nivedita was now also convinced that the British ruled in India primarily for *their own good* and 'not what the humbugs would make the world believe, for the good of the governed'.⁴⁰ Far from promoting the good of the governed, the real object behind British rule in India, Nivedita believed, was to *destroy the common bond* that existed among the Indians,⁴¹ and as such Nivedita felt that she must continue to speak against the British rule in India 'in the interests of justice'.⁴² This meant her not leaving the educational work she belonged to but going beyond its confines and extending her educational work into a political mission as well. This resolve finds its most eloquent expression in the following words of Nivedita uttered in her 10 June 1901 letter:

I belong to my work—to the women—and to the girls....And I belong to *Hinduism* more than I ever did. But I see the *political* need so clearly too! That is all I mean—and to that I must be true.

33. Describing the difficult situation of Bose at Presidency College, Lizelle Reymond observes:

'As he was a Hindu, the Committee had not given him a proper title. This meant a reduction in salary and prevented him from having his own laboratory. Out of loyalty to his Hindu colleagues at the University, Bose had decided to lodge an individual protest and had simply refused to accept his reduced salary. The struggle had gone on for three years. Then, his research on polarization having awakened considerable interest with the result that the Royal Society in London offered him a scholarship—that Government had been forced to give him a title retroactively.

The struggle, however, was a hard one, and Jagadish Bose was left in a terrible state of discouragement.' — *The Dedicated*, p. 181.

34. *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, vol. 1, p. 119.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 123.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

39. *Ibid.*

40. *Ibid.*, p. 395. Letter dated 5 November 1900.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 396.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 398.

I believe now that I have something to do for grown-up India and for Indian men.⁴³

We must quote another passage from one of Nivedita's letters to show how utterly indignant she had meanwhile grown of any political opinion to the effect that India needed the rule of the British in India:

If...anyone had the smallest true idea of what foreign rule means to any country, but above all what it means to India at this moment, of the moral degradation, of the despicable enervation, that it is producing, he would cut his own throat, rather than allowing it to speak such a blasphemy [the requiring of foreign rule] against Humanity. That is the one political opinion to which I would be utterly intolerant, were I a National Government, condemning persons who held it to penal servitude for life on an island ruled by foreigners.⁴⁴

IV

Being utterly contemptuous of the fact that England was 'content to be represented by a pack of public-school boys mad after gold-dust'⁴⁵ and that whatever nobility there was in her 'at least seemed dead',⁴⁶ Nivedita declared, 'I must tell you with the utmost intensity that I have no interest in anything done by the Government for India'.⁴⁷ Why? Nivedita answers the question herself:

India was absorbed in study: a gang of robbers came upon her and destroyed her land. The mood is broken. Can the robbers teach her anything? No, she has to turn them out, and go back to where she was before. Something like that, I

fancy, is the true programme for India.⁴⁸

Having thus outlined the true programme for India, Nivedita describes her own orientation in such a programme in the following terms:

And so I have nothing to do with Xtians or Government-agencies, as long as the government is Foreign. That which is Indian for India, I touch the feet of, however stupid and futile. Anything else will do a little good and much harm, and I have nothing to do with it. Yes, my way will do some harm, too, but it will be *vital* to the people themselves—Good and Evil of their own—not any others—and for such harm I care nothing. They need it.⁴⁹

Did such a programme for India and Nivedita's own role in such a programme require her leaving the educational work for which her Master had primarily brought her to India? The answer is an assertive 'no'. As Nivedita herself puts it:

Do not think that I can be forgetful of the planting of trees, the training of children, the farming of land. But we want also the ringing cry, the passion of the multitude, the *longing* for death. And we cannot do without these.⁵⁰

Training her gun specifically on those who were doing harm to India, those who 'gag her and feed her with morphine-laden soothing syrup',⁵¹ Nivedita identifies them in the following terms:

To me now a missionary is as a snake to be crushed with my heel. The better he is doing, the worse he is—as far as I am concerned at least. I mean that I have no

43. Ibid., p. 432.

44. Ibid., p. 447. Letter dated 3 October 1901.

45. Ibid., p. 434.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid., p. 435.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid., p. 436.

51. Ibid., p. 437.

minute to spare in the judgement of such—and condemn sweepingly if I must give sentence.

The English official is a fool, playing amidst smoking ruins and crying on the highway that he builds well.

For these and for all other bought men, paid spies, mercenaries, India has no use and no time.⁵²

Asserting that 'very different' must be the work of those who meant to save India, Nivedita identifies such work as arousing national consciousness that 'she has to save herself'.⁵³ To quote Nivedita:

All we have to do is to float with the tide, *anywhere* it may take us—to speak the whole word that comes to us—to strike the blow on the instant of heat.⁵⁴

Nivedita felt that the 'time was ripe'⁵⁵ for the rise of the Indians against England, that a blow will be struck 'in 20 years from now'⁵⁶ forcing people in England itself 'to rise up and say "Hands off"! This people

shall be free!'⁵⁷

Stationed as Nivedita was in the West itself at the time of making this assertion, she felt that not much worthwhile work could be done to this end for India in England:

How silly I think it now to do anything *in England* for India I cannot tell you! What utter waste of time! Do you think ravening wolves can be made as gentle babes? Can be made polite and sweet as little girls? That is what *work in England for India* means.⁵⁸

Thus Nivedita felt that she must return to India⁵⁹ to do this work of India *in India* itself. 'My task', as she said, 'is to see and to make others see. The rest does itself. The vision is the great crisis....I must work out the vision that is granted to me'.⁶⁰

52. Ibid., p. 436.

53. Ibid., p. 437.

54. Ibid., p. 436.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid., p. 435.

59. Nivedita came to India in January 1898 and returned to the West in July 1899 in order to collect funds for her Baghbazar school for girls. She stayed on in the West till January 1902 and came back to India to rejoin Swami Vivekananda in February 1902.

60. Ibid., pp. 436-37.

With your whole body and mind serve the holy. Question them, and follow their teachings with faith and reverence. Only thus may you be cleansed of the impurities and worldliness accumulated from many lives. By imitating the holy, devotion increases and the heart becomes purified. The association of the holy is the only remedy for worldliness; for a holy man is the living manifestation of God....

Craving for sense objects is like the sedge that obscures the clear water of a pond, and association with the holy is like the stick used to remove it, that the water may shine through.

—Swami Premananda, *Precepts for Perfection*, p. 64

Vedanta and Secularism

K.K. CHOPRA

The author, of Delhi, focusses his attention on some of the many problems that face Indians today.

India has a cultural tradition of over five thousand years. During this period, the Indian sages made a comprehensive study of nature both in the outer and in the inner world. There was a relentless search for truth: to find out whether there was any imperishable entity or force behind the perishable world. Not finding the answer in the outer world, where they found everything subject to change, decay and death, they turned their minds inward and ultimately succeeded in discovering that ultimate reality, the non-dual, the One behind the many, both within man and in the world outside.

According to Swami Ranganathananda,

the impressive record of these endeavours and the truths and insights gained therefrom have been preserved for humanity in the immortal literature, the Upanishads, which form the closing portions of the vast and varied Vedic literature. Since they contain the philosophy—the quintessence of the Vedas—the Upanishads are also known as Vedanta.

The Upanishads teach the non-duality of the ultimate Reality and the possibility of different approaches to it. The *Rig-Veda* gives eloquent expression to this great idea in its famous dictum: '*ekam sat, viprā bahudhā vadanti*, Truth is one, sages call It by various names.'

Vedanta asserts the basic oneness of the universe, that every soul is potentially di-

vine and that the goal of human life is to manifest that divinity already in man. The Hindu's religion also gives one the freedom to choose one's own Chosen Ideal. As Swami Vivekananda put it,

From the high spiritual flights of the Vedanta philosophy, of which the latest discoveries of science seem like echoes, to the low ideas of idolatry with its multifarious mythology, the agnosticism of the Buddhists, and the atheism of the Jains, each and all have a place in the Hindu's religion.¹

Swami Vivekananda also proclaimed the principle of harmony between science and religion, between the sacred and the secular, between the East and the West, and above all, the harmony of religions.

These have been the essential ingredients of the Hindu way of life right from the Vedic period, fortified by Sri Krishna in the *Gita*, Bhagavan Buddha, Acharya Shankara, Guru Nanak and, in the modern age, by Ramakrishna-Vivekananda.

It was this Vedantic perspective actually practised in India which prompted Swami Vivekananda to declare in an emphatic voice—while presenting a paper on Hinduism—at the Parliament of Religions in 1893:

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), vol. 1, p. 6. [Hereafter CW.]

I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth. I am proud to tell you that we have gathered in our bosom the purest remnant of the Israelites, who came to Southern India and took refuge with us in the very year in which their holy temple was shattered to pieces by Roman tyranny. I am proud to belong to the religion which has sheltered and is still fostering the remnant of the grand Zoroastrian nation.²

This is the conclusive proof of the universal approach of the Hindu religion and this had gone deep into the nation's blood. The very nature of a Hindu is secular. He has not to make any extra effort to be secular. This spirit has continued till today in spite of severe jolts from foreign invasions, the torture of conversion by force under the Muslim rule, and proselytisation by Christian missionaries with the active connivance of the British rulers.

In 1947, the subcontinent was divided on the basis of a two-nation theory into India and Pakistan. While Pakistan became a theocratic state, India, rightly and wisely, continued to be a secular state in tune with its cultural heritage.

Secularism simply means, in the Vedantic background,* that the State has no special leaning towards any religion, that all

religions enjoy an equal status, being equally effective in taking men and women to their goal in life. But in our country, in the name of secularism, many distortions have taken place. Very glaring is the leaning towards specific religious communities. In the first place, the minorities in India have been given the privilege of opening their own schools and teaching their religion while the majority community cannot do the same. This is religious discrimination.

Every Indian is supposed to take pride in India's cultural heritage which dates back to the Vedic period and includes the Upanishads, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Gita*, the Puranas, etc., and a host of other literature. The universal principles taught in these books should have been made the essential ingredients of India's educational system so as to impart a man-making and character-building education to students—the future of the country—and thus strengthen the moral fibre of the nation. But when it comes to teaching this literature in the schools, it becomes 'Hindu' literature and is thus shunned.

Sri Ramakrishna is the only person in the religious history of the world who practised Islam and Christianity besides the Hindu religion and came to the conclusion that all religions are equally true and lead to the same goal. His disciple Swami Vivekananda preached the gospel of universal love and brotherhood in all his speeches and utterances. These two illustrious sons of India are the products of the modern age. But when it comes to teaching their lives and messages in the schools, they suddenly be-

education and other matters of civil policy should be conducted without introduction of a religious element.

However, in the various articles of the Constitution of India we do find specific benefits for members of various religious communities and denominations thereunder.

2. CW., vol.1, pp. 3–4.

* *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* defines 'secularism' as 1. Secular spirit or tendency, esp. a system of political or social philosophy that rejects all forms of religious faith and worship. 2. the view that public

come 'Hindus' and are thus avoided. We proudly quote Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, though without sincerity:

...I can tell you that many of my generation were very powerfully influenced by him and I think it would do a great deal of good to the present generation if they also went through Swami Vivekananda's writings and speeches,... He gave us something which brings us, if I may use the word, a certain pride in our inheritance.... What Swamiji has written and said is of interest and must interest us and is likely to influence us for a long time to come. He was ... one of the great founders—if you like, you may use any other word—of the national modern movement of India,... I think that our younger generation will take advantage of this fountain of wisdom, of spirit and fire, that flows through Swami Vivekananda.³

India of today is beset with many problems of disappearance of moral and ethical values, corruption, communalism, casteism, nepotism, utter selfishness, lethargy, etc. All these maladies have erupted only because moral and spiritual values have not been made a part of our educational system.

Values are as a frame which holds us together and gives shape to what we are. A person without values is like a paper rose without fragrance. Values do not grow on trees nor do they fall from the clouds or are dug up from the earth. Values cannot be injected into the human body or enforced by any law. Values are contained in our scriptures, and unless we draw nourishment

from them, value-based life will remain only an illusion.

Vedanta respects all religions as equally true and preaches the harmony of religions. Let the values be drawn from all the scriptures of the world and taught in our schools. But unfortunately, in the name of secularism, this is not being done. A lip service to the values, without reference to the bright examples found in the scriptures, does not carry conviction. Merely saying that we be honest and truthful does not help. A modern young man asks the question, 'Why should I be honest when everyone is dishonest these days?' Here the epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* come to our assistance. Teaching of such literature leaves a deep impact on the mind, strengthens one's character and serves as a bulwark against all the temptations of life. A person, fortified with the values of life, which are embedded in our scriptures, develops the capacity to withstand all the immoral pressures of life and can thus be a noble person himself and an asset to the society and the country. That is why the teachings of the scriptures are essential. Let us not forget the note of warning given by Swami Vivekananda:

...if you give up that spirituality, leaving it aside to go after the materialising civilisation of the West, the result will be that in three generations you will be an extinct race; because the backbone of the nation will be broken, the foundation upon which the national edifice has been built will be undermined, and the result will be annihilation all round.⁴

Another distortion that has taken place in our country, again in the name of secularism, is the creation of reservations for certain

(Continued on page 76)

3. Excerpt from a lecture by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru delivered at Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi, on 20 March 1949. Quoted in *Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1960), pp. 3–6.

4. CW., vol. 3, p. 153.

Monastic Experience in the West

ANANDA

There are problems for every spiritual aspirant, perhaps, more so in the West than in the East. The reason is partly the social fabric. It should be the concern of every western parent to modify the social life-pattern so that the grand young country that America is can produce in larger numbers men and women of renunciation who would take the bold step to live in God and succeed therein. There are eager spiritual aspirants who find it difficult, if not impossible, to battle with their emotions. So, what has come into existence is the term 'monastic experience' which gives an individual an opportunity to see first hand what monastic life is all about. The author, a westerner, discusses some aspects of his early life in a monastery.

The Ramakrishna Monastery at Trabuco Canyon, California, lies on a remote hill in the arid mountains of Southern California. Forty acres of land belong to the monastery. Hundreds more acres of as yet undeveloped land, some of which are preserved as parkland, surround the property. The monastery was founded in 1949, when Gerald Heard's 'Trabuco College' was deeded to the Vedanta Society of Southern California. At this time, human habitation was scarcely seen from the monastery. The place was a real hermitage. Now, the urban sprawl of Southern California threatens to approach the monastery gates. Still, the ashrama remains serene and tranquil. Rabbits, deer, and an occasional mountain lion roam about the grounds and the stars are not quite washed out by city lights.

The central hub of the monastery is the shrine. The day begins with meditation. Worship (puja) is conducted at noon by one of the monastery inmates, and generally the others come for meditation at that time. Arati is performed after sunset, and is followed by a third meditation period. Thus three times each day the monks enter the shrine for formal worship, japa, and meditation.

Around this framework of 'shrine time', the various duties and activities of the

monks take place. Like most American Ramakrishna centres, there are no paid staff at the monastery. All the work must be done by the five resident monks, the occasional devotee and retreatant, and any young brahmacharins who may be there. At present, the monks cannot quite keep up with the workload. The extensive grounds and many buildings require constant maintenance. Vegetable and flower gardens need care and attention, and guests must be cordially received and shown around. Daily duties like cooking, cleaning, performing the worship, and grocery shopping, rotate weekly among the inmates. Other duties like keeping the accounts, managing the small bookstore, and maintaining the vegetable garden generally fall to one person. Two monks are public speakers and must prepare lectures, and are also involved with translation projects. Some monks take time for physical exercise and study. So the days are full.

The youngest monk is in his mid-forties, the oldest 79. Monasteries across America are experiencing a shortage of young members; so too the Trabuco Monastery. While many, perhaps dozens of young men over the years, have stayed at this monastery for a few months or a few years, only a handful have stuck to their guns and re-

mained to take sannyasa vows. The biggest obstacle for American novices, brahmacharins, seems to be just that—brahmacharya. There is no support for celibate life in American culture. Precisely the opposite idea is preached through television, films, newspapers, magazines, and virtually every facet of society. As a result, most young men have (mis)spent their youth cultivating, rather than denying, sexual desires and activities. When the call to spiritual life, the monastic life, comes, most seem unable to bear the strain of celibacy, and take to householder life.

Also, materialism is so deeply rooted in American culture that few, perhaps, even hear the call to renunciation. Young men are busy establishing careers, or just eking out a living, chasing 'woman and gold'. Few have time for higher thoughts. The ideal of renunciation is virtually unknown in American society as a whole (excepting perhaps some Christian communities). So even among those called to spiritual life, few feel called to renounce. (Many are called, few are chosen!?)

The senior monks at the monastery are pioneers. They are among the first Americans to take sannyasa vows and to remain in the Order. Years of association with their guru, Swami Prabhavananda (affectionately known as 'Swami P.'), and years of discipline in shrine and field have moulded these men. Their efforts, their striving, their worship and meditation have transformed what was a collection of buildings into a monastery with deep spiritual vibrations.

The public work of the monastery is growing. Originally the monastery was a hermitage only; public lectures were begun later, but for years were poorly attended. Three years ago, informal Sunday afternoon talks, given by a monk, were attended by fifteen to twenty-five guests. More formal Sunday morning lectures are now attended by fifty to seventy-five people. 'We now have a congregation', said one senior monk,

not without a hint of longing in his voice for the solitude and isolation of earlier years.

Compared with Indian monasteries, physical life at Trabuco is almost luxurious. All the amenities of Western life are provided—running hot water, shower stalls, private, heated rooms; clothes washer and dryer, and so on. The kitchen is open at all time for the hungry resident, be it 10 a.m. or midnight, and the pantry and refrigerator are well-stocked with all kinds of food. There is a television set, used primarily for watching sporting events. On the other hand, much of the work is hard physical labour. The monks dig in the gardens, dig trenches for new gas and water lines, mow fields, fix tractors, install plumbing fixtures, and have built with their own hands a guest-house and recently a bridge. Also, they must strive to maintain a current of spirituality in a society whose current flows the other way and which is suspicious of 'foreign' religions.

My stay at the Trabuco Monastery, though short (at the time of writing this article), gave me an opportunity to focus intensely on spiritual life, and to experience monastic life firsthand. The monastery sheltered me from the outside world, allowing me to see more clearly the worldliness in me. Distractions to meditation were reduced. The routine, a mostly harmonious combination of work, meditation, and study, formed a framework or ground for spiritual practice. I found that the repeated returns to the shrine softened the workload, and an awareness and remembrance cultivated in the shrine could spill over into work periods. As external activities were largely prescribed, my mind was more free to turn inward. I also had the privilege to learn and perform the worship of Sri Ramakrishna in the monastery shrine. Performing this worship on the relics of Sri Ramakrishna, in the same place as has been done daily for nearly fifty years, my mind became easily concentrated, and my devotion increased as if by itself.

The great austerity was community life. I deeply respect and love all the monks. Even so, inner conflicts would arise in the course of my interaction with them. Perhaps I wanted to undertake some project, and I was prohibited. Perhaps a monk had one habit which irritated me to frustration. Such difficulties, I am told, are inevitable in community life. I tried to turn them into opportunities for learning humility, patience, acceptance, and non-judgement. Occasionally, I had to face loneliness. The lessons were not always easy, but ultimately, when the external life became difficult, I was forced to turn inward, and this was itself the great reward.

I tried to learn many things from the monks, by observation and osmosis. Virtues like forbearance towards and acceptance of illness, patience, humility, deep devotion (hiding just beneath the surface), renunciation and discipline in meditation all inspired me. Then too, the occasional correction came, as a remark clothed in gentle humour, yet not failing to reach its mark, alerting me to a flaw in my character.

No place on earth is perfect, and the Trabuco Monastery too has shortcomings, but all in all, it appeals to me as an excellent place to dig a well—that is, to strive for the realization of God. □

Vedanta and Secularism

(Continued from page 73)

classes of people. Reservations were initially made for the scheduled castes/tribes *for a period of ten years* in our Constitution and *then to be reviewed*. The whole idea seemed to be to get rid of them in due course of time. But what has happened is just the reverse of what was originally intended. Reservations have become more or less permanent and new categories are being added to the list.

Even the converts through proselytisation are demanding reservation so that they can enjoy the benefits and privileges attached to such reservations. Reservations create a vested interest which the beneficiaries do not want to lose. Reservations dampen the spirit to improve and become equal to others. There is no time limit to the reservations policy and thus they have become almost perpetual. Scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, other backward classes, minorities, women—everyone wants reservations in educational institutions. *Who ever takes thought for the fate of those 'privileged' students who, lacking in merit, are unable to receive what their teacher teaches?* Reservations extend also to services and public life. Not only in

entering services but in promotions also, reservations are demanded. The result has been an all-round deterioration in all fields of service. *Persons with sub-standard qualifications are placed in places where they do not really fit in on the basis of merit. The best course would have been to give educational and other economic facilities to all weaker sections of society, irrespective of caste, creed or religion, and help them to come up in life, make them fit for competing with others and take their due place in society on the basis of their intrinsic merit.* In a Vedantic sense we should strive to remove the obstacles on the path to the manifestation of perfection in the less gifted. This will give them dignity, self-respect and self-confidence. Reservation props are good for a limited period but create drones in the long run.

Secularism, as properly understood and interpreted, is the only way of life suited for our country but it should be suffused with Vedantic ideals so that we help all our unfortunate brothers and sisters, and serve them with the motivation that 'Service to man is worship of God.' □

The Origin of the Ramakrishna Order

DR. NIROD BARAN CHAKRABORTY

In this article Dr. Nirod Baran Chakraborty discusses the events that led to the origin of the Ramakrishna Order. He points out that 'in the Math, God is generally worshipped in the image of Sri Ramakrishna, the latest incarnation of God, and japa and dhyana are performed, while some meditate on Him as the Formless Absolute, specially in the Advaita Maths. All men of different castes, creeds and religions have easy entrance to the Math. The Mission, worshipping God in human form in the wide world, runs hospitals, schools, colleges, conducts relief and rehabilitation projects at the time of calamities, projects for rural and tribal development and also for upliftment of rural masses. In this context service to man is accepted as service to God.... [Thus] in the Math and the Mission we get worship of God, but in two different forms'. Sharing the views of many eminent thinkers of the world, the author observes that, 'in Vedanta—theoretical and practical—, which the Order preaches and practises, lies the salvation of the world from degradation and decay'.

The Ramakrishna Order, with its two wings—the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission—, has now world-wide reputation as a spiritual association with a catholic, non-sectarian and universal outlook. Though the Math and Mission are separate bodies in the eye of Law now, still these are very much interrelated and ultimately non-different.¹ In the Math, God is generally worshipped in the image of Sri Ramakrishna, the latest incarnation of God, and japa and dhyana are performed, while some meditate on Him as the Formless Absolute, specially in the Advaita Maths. All men of different castes, creeds and religions have easy entrance to the Math. The Mission, worshipping God in human form in the wide world, runs hospitals, schools, colleges, conducts relief and rehabilitation

projects at the time of calamities, projects for rural and tribal development and also for upliftment of rural masses. In this context service to man is accepted as service to God. This is also a form of worship. So both in the Math and the Mission we get worship of God, but in two different forms. Ordinary people do not make any difference between Ramakrishna Mission and Ramakrishna Math; to them the whole organization is the Ramakrishna Mission or the Ramakrishna Math.

On 27 January 1900, speaking before the Shakespeare Club of Pasadena, Swami Vivekananda said: 'All the ideas that I preach are only an attempt to echo his (Sri Ramakrishna's) ideas. Nothing is mine originally except the wicked ones. But every word that I have ever uttered which is true and good, is simply an attempt to echo his voice.' It is clear, therefore, that Narendranath was the medium through whom Sri Ramakrishna unfolded his mission after he entered *mahasamadhi*.

1. In this context, the second President of the Ramakrishna Order, Swami Shivananda, gives us light. He says: 'any attempt to find a distinction between the ideals of the Math and the Mission is unholy and dangerous'. See *The Report of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission Convention, 1926*, p. 34.

In 1910 a significant event happened at

Belur Math. Lady Minto, the wife of the then Viceroy of India, visited the Belur Math and remarked that the Ramakrishna Math was a creation of Swami Vivekananda. Swami Shivananda, who was then a Trustee of the Math, at once corrected her saying, 'We did not found this Order. It was the Master who brought it into being during his illness. At that time he instructed Swami Vivekananda as to how this Order was to be organized and conducted.'²

The Origin

The origin of the *Ramakrishna Math* can be easily traced to Sri Ramakrishna's Dakshineswar and Cossipore days. When Sri Ramakrishna had completed his spiritual practices in the various paths of Hinduism and also of other religions, he had several revelations about himself and about his future mission, one of which was this: '...as an instrument in the hands of the Mother of the Universe, he would have to found a new communion especially fit for the liberal faith revealed in his own life.'³

As a result of his *sadhanas*, Sri Ramakrishna realized certain spiritual truths: that the sole aim of human life is to attain God, that everyone has the right to God-realization through sincere effort, that all religions are true and so many forms only of one undying Eternal Religion, that each one has to approach God in one's own way, that men and women are essentially divine, that human relationship is best expressed in terms of service as worship, that it is better to make positive efforts for progress than to be sorrowing over sin and moral lapses, and

that all social changes must be based on spirituality.

At Cossipore, the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna had to attend on an ailing Sri Ramakrishna and they stayed together round the clock and, therefore, they came very close to each other. Thus, they were bound in a tie of love for the Master. Under the loving care of the Master, the disciples lived as a happy family at Cossipore. The Master was there as the guiding spirit. The Master specially prepared the Holy Mother and his beloved Naren, the most intelligent and gifted disciple for the task of establishing the Order.

The Master once asked Sri Sarada Devi, 'Will you not do anything? Shall I have to do everything single-handed?' The Mother in reply said, 'I am a woman. What can I do?' The Master told her, 'You will have to do many things.' He taught her different spiritual formulas (*mantras*) which she gave later on to her disciples. He used to call her his Śakti, non-different from him, even as the burning power of fire is non-different from fire.

The Master told Naren to see that his ascetic disciples did not go back home after his departure. Before leaving his body, the Master called Naren and asked him to sit before him. He gazed at his disciple for some time and Naren felt as if an electric current from the Master was passing through his body and he lost outer consciousness. When he came to his normal sense, he found the Master weeping. On being asked the reason for this, the Master said, 'O Naren, I have given you my all and have become a pauper. Through this power you will do great things.' The Master's prophecy became true. Naren, as Swami Vivekananda, really raised a cyclone in the East and the West and came to be known as the 'cyclonic monk'.

Remarking on the origin of the Math at

2. Swami Gambhirananda, *The History of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1983), p. 4. [Hereafter *History*.]

3. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1970), p. 300.

the Cossipore garden house, Swami Vivekananda wrote in 1887, 'All our associations centre round that garden, In reality that was the first Math.' The Master himself had given ochre cloths and rosaries to his ascetic disciples and thus he had established his 'Sannyasi Sangha'. Of course, later on they became sannyasins formally by performing the Viraja Homa.

The Holy Mother, on her part, prayed to the Master after he had entered *maha-samadhi* that his all-renouncing disciples live together centering him and hold on to his ideals as well as give solace to the afflicted. The Master too told his house-holder devotee Surendranath Mitra in a vision, 'What are you doing? My boys are roaming about without a shelter. First find some remedy for that.'⁴

Likewise the origin of the *Ramakrishna Mission* can also be traced to Sri Ramakrishna's ideas. In 1884 at Dakshineswar Sri Ramakrishna expressed the idea: 'Service to man is service to God' (*Śiva jñāne jīva sevā*) when he was discussing the Vaishnava tenets: 'taste for the name and compassion to Jiva' (*Nāme ruci, jīve dayā*). The Ramakrishna Mission as a philanthropic organization was established on the basis of the idea noted above. To Sri Ramakrishna, the realization of God is the goal of human life. This may be done in different ways by different men and women according to their capability and taste. As God can be realized by knowledge or work or devotion or meditation, so can this be done by service to man performed as service to God, which, according to Swami Virajananda, is the combination of the traditional four yogas: *jñāna, karma, bhakti* and *yoga*.⁵

The role of Sri Sarada Devi behind the organization (both the Math and the Mission) has been admitted by Swami Vivekananda himself. In his lecture 'My Life and Mission' delivered in California in 1900, Swamiji said that after his Master's passing away, he and his brother disciples were ridiculed by all. Nobody understood them, nobody supported the monastic way of life they had chosen. Her sympathy brought blessing and hope to them. She was none else than the wife of their Master. She, to them, was the Holy Mother. But she was powerless as she was poorer than they were. She, as we said before, literally wept to the Master for a shelter for her roaming ascetic children. After that the Math was established at Belur Math. Swamiji admitted her to be the 'Sangha Janani' (the guiding Mother of the organization) when he formally announced the formation of the Ramakrishna Mission. Later on, whenever any difficulty arose in the organization, her advice was sought and on carrying out her mandate the problem got resolved. That is a long story and we cannot narrate it here.

The Ramakrishna Mission was formally established by Swami Vivekananda—as an instrument in the hands of Sri Ramakrishna—on 1 May 1897, at the house of Balaram Bose, Baghbazar, Calcutta, in a representative meeting of the monks and the lay devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. This shows that the Ramakrishna Mission is an organization established jointly by the monks and the lay devotees under the leadership of Swami Vivekananda. While declaring the formal inauguration of the organization, Swamiji said that from his travels in various countries he had come to the conclusion that nothing fruitful could be done without an organization. So he was establishing the Ramakrishna Mission to propagate the truths which Sri Ramakrishna had, for the good of humanity, preached and demonstrated by practical application in his own

4. *History*, p. 33.

5. Swami Virajananda, *Paramārtha-prasaṅga: Towards the Goal Supreme* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1979), pp. 266–72.

life and to help others to put these truths into practice in their lives for their temporal, mental and spiritual advancement. The famine relief by Swami Akhandananda in Murshidabad was the first relief work of the Ramakrishna Mission. In this field also Sri Ramakrishna himself had set an example to his disciples by helping distressed people at Deoghar and Kalaighata.⁶

The Ramakrishna Mission, as we have said before, is non-sectarian, non-political and non-proselytizing. Mr. Federico Mayor, Director General of UNESCO, remarked in October 1993, 'I am struck by the similarity of the Constitution of the Ramakrishna Mission which Vivekananda established as early as in 1897 with that of UNESCO drawn up in 1945.'⁷

The philanthropic activities of the Ramakrishna Mission are generally emphasized. But its cultural, specially the literary and the spiritual, activities are also equally important. Different publications specially the translations in English and regional languages with notes and explanations of different philosophical and religious texts originally written in Sanskrit, a language not understood by the majority of people here and abroad, shed light on our rich heritage. We are all indebted to the monks of the Ramakrishna Order for this excellent job. The journals like *Prabuddha Bharata*, *Vedanta Kesari* and *Udbodhan* have been publishing

some class articles which enrich our culture and help achieve a qualitative change in our life-style. Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda, their direct disciples and other monks are brought out in their different facets in different books. These give solace, peace and happiness in thousands of lives. Scriptural classes at different Math and Mission centres, lectures on cultural and spiritual topics at different places and specially the lives led by the monks of the Order inspire people to lead a better life. This will make a better world possible. Thousands and thousands of devotees are approaching the monks for solace, peace and happiness in their lives. The *Cultural Heritage of India* in six volumes published by the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture is considered a classical publication in the field of Indian history, philosophy, religion and science by all English-knowing scholars of the world. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* in nine volumes, *Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master* and the like publications of the Mission, both the original and the translations into different languages, are educative and creative of a better being. In Vedanta—theoretical and practical—, which the Mission preaches and practises, lies the salvation of the world from degradation and decay. This is a view expressed by many eminent thinkers of the world. Uninterrupted continuation of the Mission activities are necessary for a civilized, peaceful and happy existence. On its first centenary we expect its many many centenaries in future. □

6. Deoghar is in Bihar and Kalaighata is in Nadia District of West Bengal.

7. *Prabuddha Bharata*, January 1994, p. 21.

The greatest strength of character is to live in harmony with all.... Never utter one word that would hurt another.... It is easy to live in harmony with saints, but real strength lies in living in harmony with all beings.

—Swami Turiyananda, *Precepts for Perfection*, p. 105

Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan

*The saga of a monk's dream come true and
magnified through his life-long effort*

SWAMI RAMANANDA

What follows is the narration of how a monk's dream became a reality in course of time and how with his loving care, it grew during his life-time. Sri Ramakrishna repeatedly advised men and women to give up 'lust and lucre' and devote oneself to spiritual practices. Therefore, it is rare one comes across a monk whose 'heart bled for the Indian mothers on account of their miserable plight during child-birth and for their hapless and neglected new-borns' and who, consequently, dreamt of an institution for their welfare. Behind this dream lay not only a feeling heart, an ever-active intellect and an indomitable will, all of which were certainly required in bringing to fruition this revolutionary move, but there was also a perception of the divine in his manifold forms.

*From highest Brahman to the yonder worm,
And to the very minutest atom,
Everywhere is the same God, the All-Love;
Friend, offer mind, soul, body, at their feet.*

*These are His manifold forms before thee,
Rejecting them, where seekest thou for God?
Who loves all beings without distinction,
He indeed is worshipping best his God.*

*(The Complete Works of Swami
Vivekananda, vol. 4, p. 498)*

History of its origination

An active young monk of the Ramakrishna Order preaching Vedanta as a part of his missionary work in California, U.S.A., returned to India in the early thirties with a pain in his heart and a dream, a new vision, in his eyes. His heart bled for Indian mothers on account of their miserable plight during child-birth and for their hapless and neglected new-borns in the prevailing scenario of an abysmal lack of medical and nursing care facilities in the country obtaining then, in comparison with what he saw of excellent facilities and compassionate care given abroad. The monk, Revered Srimat Swami

Dayanandaji Maharaj, a disciple of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, resolved to start a Mission Centre for Mother and Child Welfare obtaining the necessary permission from the authorities of the Ramakrishna Order with its Headquarters at Belur, and turned his dream into a reality, acting on the noble dictates of his compassionate heart.

In July 1932, he founded a small Maternity-cum-Child Welfare Centre with financial assistance from an American devotee Miss Helen Rubel (Sister Bhakti) in a rented accommodation in a South Calcutta backstreet, overcoming all obstacles that stood on the way. Thus came into being the 'Ramakrishna Mission Sishumangal Pratishthan' (Sishumangal, for short), the fore-runner of what is today well known as the Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan. *This is one of those rare instances when a monk not only made his dream come true, though initially on a small scale, but also lovingly nurtured it during every waking moment of his life into a fairly large multi-disciplinary hospital in its wholly owned premises through single-minded devotion and hard work, and guided its growth and expansion during his remaining 50 years!* In the latter part



*Fig. 1 'Sishumangal'
in a rented accommodation in 1932*



Fig. 2 Facade of Hospital Building at present



Fig.3 Medical Mobile Unit at a rural centre



Fig. 4 Tread Mill and Stress Testing Machine

of his life and during the period of significant growth of the Pratishthan, he was very ably assisted by Revered Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj, now Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. who, possessed of total dedication and vast administrative abilities, functioned as the Secretary of the Pratishthan.

Early History

A small plot of land was acquired at the present site of the Seva Pratishthan where the foundation stone of a permanent hospital building was laid in March 1938 by Most Revered Srimat Swami Vijnananandaji Maharaj, a direct disciple of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna and the fourth President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. The 50-bed maternity hospital built on it was later consecrated in May 1939 by Revered Srimat Swami Virajanandaji Maharaj, the sixth President of the Order. 'Sishumangal' came into its own as a model maternity and child welfare centre with an increase in its bed strength to 150 in 1950 and gained wide recognition among the general public. The year 1955 saw an addition of two small buildings on an adjacent plot of purchased land to provide living quarters to nurses and other staff along with a hostel, shrine and prayer hall, dedicated by Revered Srimat Swami Madhavanandaji Maharaj, the then General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission. Training of Nurse-Midwives also started at this time.

With the addition of a 60-bed General Hospital in a temporary shed in the year 1956 to accommodate medical, surgical and paediatric cases also, and with a consequent bed strength of 210, the original character of the Pratishthan saw a marked change, necessitating the renaming of 'Sishumangal' to 'Seva Pratishthan', by which name it is now officially called, though it is fondly referred to as 'Sishumangal' by the general public even today, especially by bus conductors

and taxi drivers.

To make the narration brief, later stages of development may be summarised as shown in Table I (see page 85).

Owing to lack of space, the institution had perforce to expand vertically with inevitable restriction in floor space for laboratory, outdoor clinics and for postgraduate teaching and research facilities in the Vivekananda Institute of Medical Sciences started in the year 1936. Through the good offices of the Government of West Bengal, four plots of adjacent bustee land were acquired on the Hazra Road side and the foundation stone for a multi-storeyed building (now called the VIMS Building) was laid by Revered Srimat Swami Vireswaranandaji Maharaj in the year 1977. A generous gift of Rs. 50 lakhs by Shri Nandalal Tantia gave a major boost in the initial stages of construction. Major out-patients departments were shifted to the completed ground floor in 1982, and the Paediatric OPD, Obs. & Gynae. OPD, Post-Partum Unit, Speech Therapy Unit and Infusion Departments to the first floor in 1983. Further construction work proceeded at a slow pace depending on the availability of funds. The Departments of Bio-Chemistry, Pathology and Blood Bank were shifted to the 2nd and 3rd floors respectively in the year 1988 and 1990. Class rooms for postgraduate teaching, VIMS library, Seminar Hall, Dean's Office, etc. were shifted in the intervening period to the 2nd floor. Construction work came to a halt for a number of years after only a portion of the fourth floor intended for housing some resident doctors had been completed. Work resumed when financial assistance to the tune of Rs. 25 lakhs was lately received from the Planning Commission through the State Government, enabling the completion of the remaining 7500 sft. (approx.) of area on the fourth floor thus providing residential quarters for doctors in the year 1996.



Fig. 5 Inauguration of Auto-Analyser Unit



Fig. 6 Whole Body CT Scanner inaugurated by Sri Jyoti Basu, Chief Minister of West Bengal

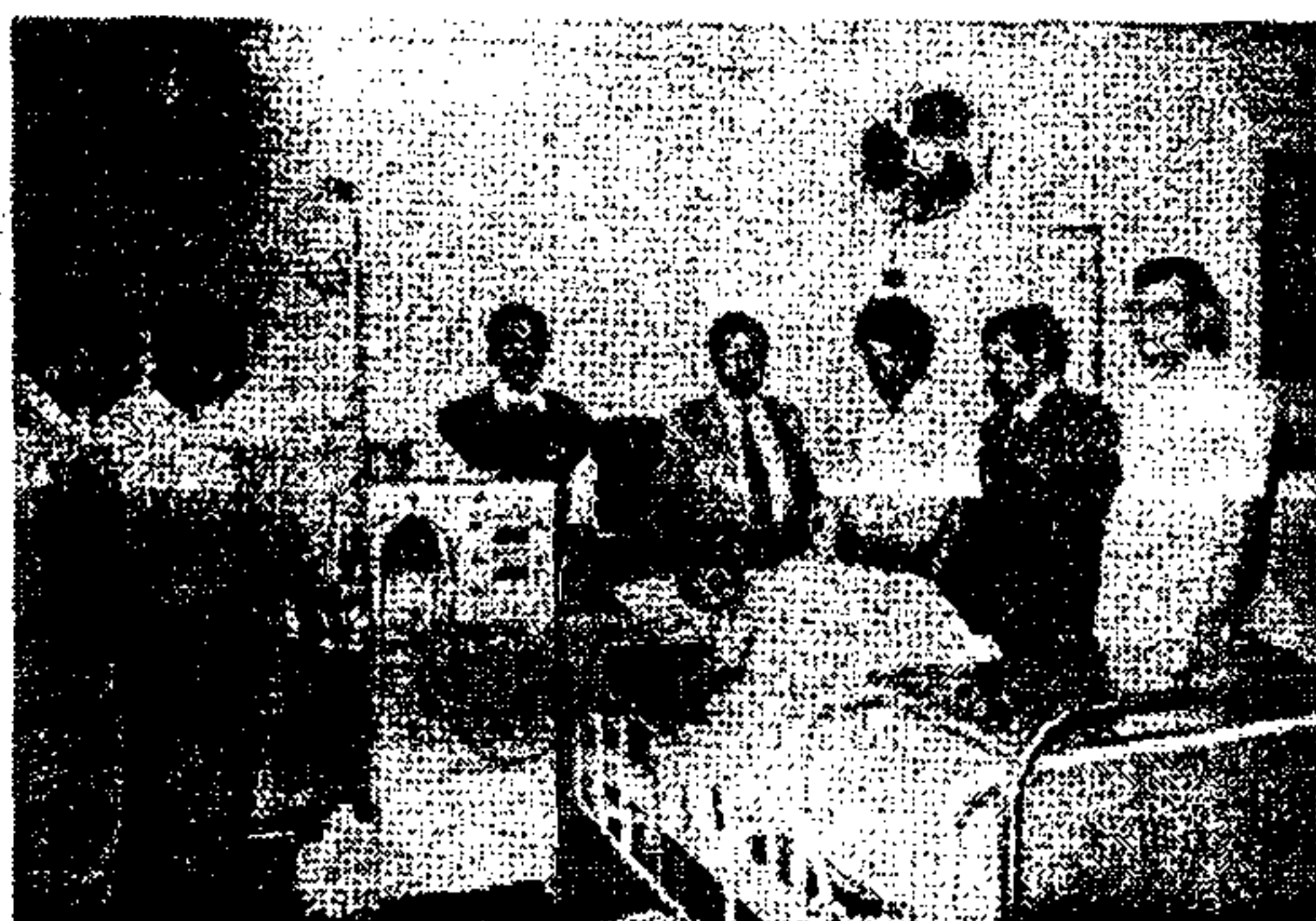


Fig. 7 Haemodialysis in progress



Fig. 8 An Operation in progress

The purpose of this somewhat detailed narration is to show the painstaking and wholly devoted efforts that have gone into the development of this prestigious institution over a period of six decades and more, the portals of which institution were sanctified by the hallowed presence of the direct disciples of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna and of the Holy Mother as also of many Presidents, Vice-Presidents and senior monks of the Order.

Administrative setup

The Managing Committee is the Apex Body and consists of a number of respectable citizens and monk-members of the Pratishthan, the Secretary being the Chief Executive of the Institution. The Committee is

appointed by the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math.

The various medical disciplines are headed by senior honorary visiting doctors assisted by other visiting colleagues as well as a large contingent of about 150 wholtime doctors (Resident Surgeons/Physicians, Resident Registrars and House Surgeons), and postgraduate medical students.

Nursing administration is headed by the Nursing Superintendent, who is assisted ably by her senior colleagues and nursing staff comprising of about thrity Ward Sisters, 140 GNM Staff Nurses, 25 Brothers and 30 *Sevikas*, totalling around 225.

Table I. *Later Stages of Development*

New Additions	Year	Consecrated/Opened by	Increased bed strength
6-storeyed building for General Wards	1962	Consecrated by Revered Srimat Swami Madhavanandaji Maharaj, ninth President of Ramakrishna Math and Mission	350
	1963	Opened by Sri Jawaharalal Nehru, first Prime Minister of India	
7-storeyed Southern Wing housing medical stores, general wards, Eye Ward, 'Premananda Ward', etc.	1972	Consecrated by Revered Srimat Swami Dayanandaji Maharaj and opened by Sri Siddhartha Shankar Ray, the then Chief Minister of West Bengal	475
5-storeyed Annexe to Northern Wing to provide additional beds in Paediatrics, Obs. & Gynae.	1976		510
Sixth floor added to 6-storeyed building above to provide a 12-bed ICCU/ICU Unit and some new beds added in First Floor	1979	Inaugurated by Revered Srimat Swami Vireswaranandaji Maharaj, tenth President of Ramakrishna Math and Mission	535
New Additions of beds in enlarged and renovated 4th floor of 'A' Block	1984		550
6-storeyed Fatehpuria Block on a narrow strip of land on south-eastern corner funded by donation received from Sri K.N. Fatehpuria to house Neurology & Nephrology Units, Whole-body C.T. Scanner, Ultrasonography, EMG with Evoke Potential, etc.	1989		



Fig. 9 Implantation of Intra-Ocular Lens

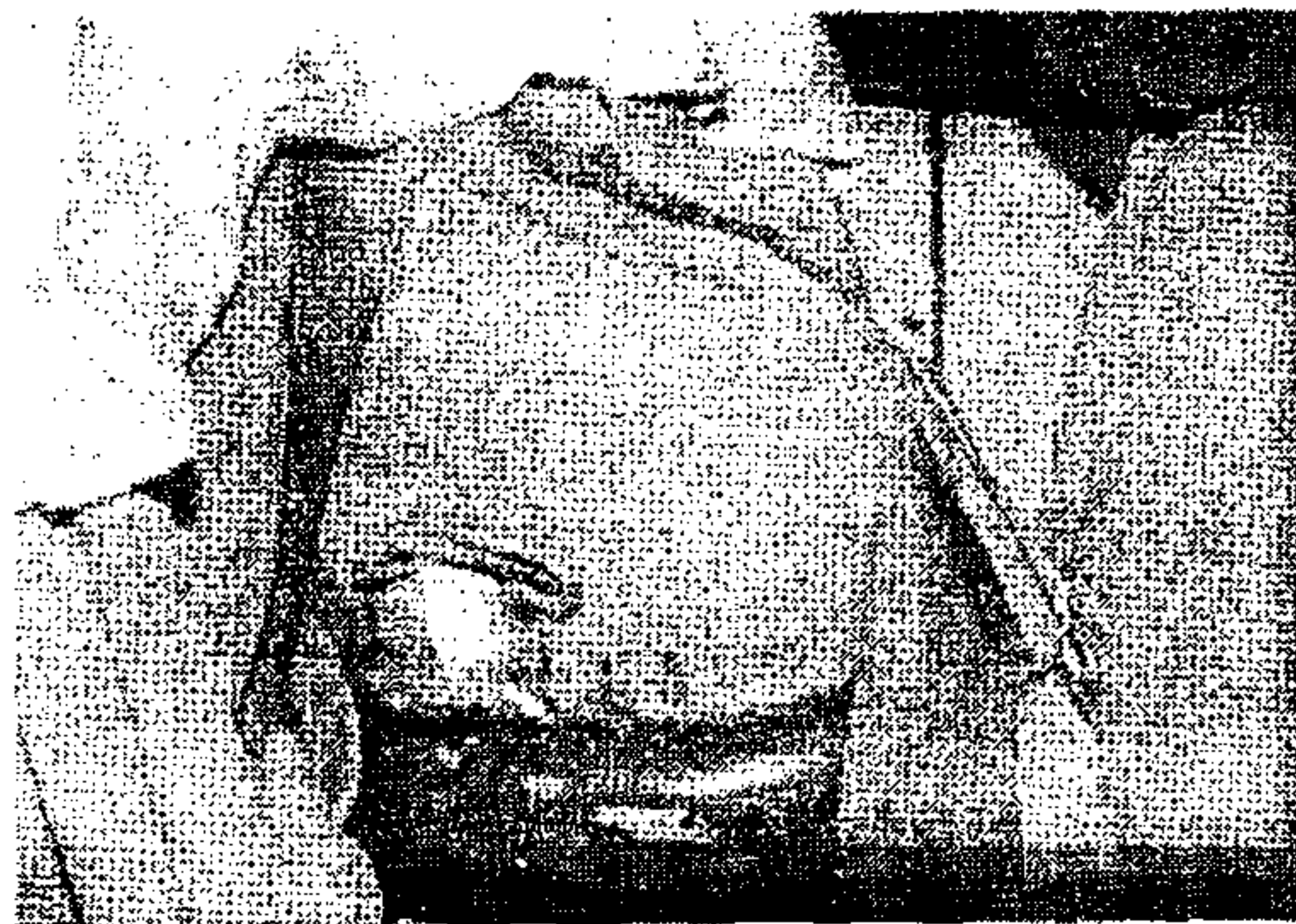


Fig. 10 Patient stitched up after brain surgery



Fig. 11 A sick new-born under medical attention

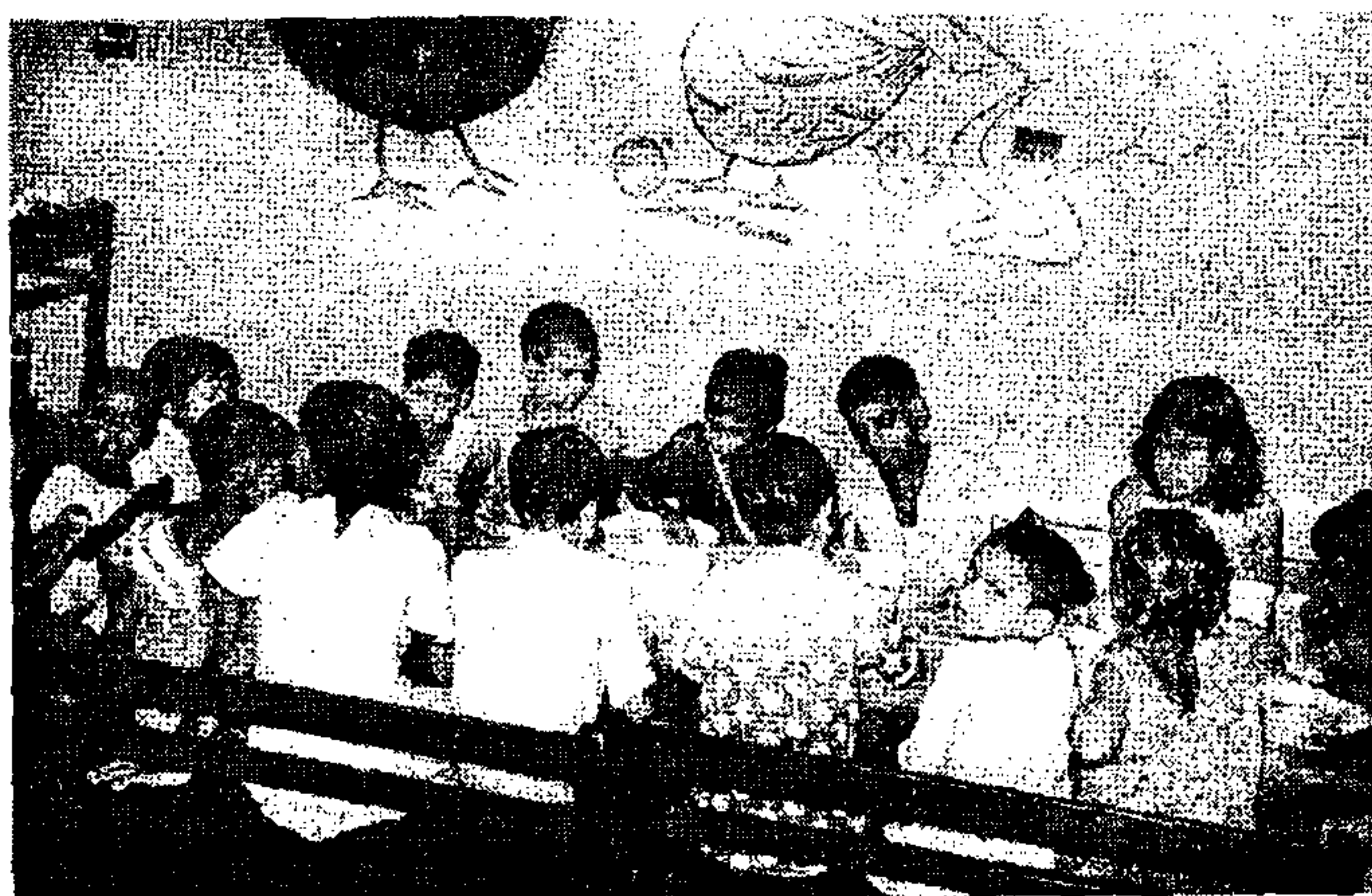


Fig. 12 Meal time in the Children's Ward

The residential GNM Nursing School has a Principal Sister Tutor assisted by a number of capable Sister Tutors.

The Vivekananda Institute of Medical Sciences is governed by a Governing Body appointed by the Governing Body of the Mission. The Dean of the Institute takes care of the daily administration and reporting of day-to-day events to the Secretary.

The Secretary is assisted by the Assistant Secretaries with authority delegated to them to manage the affairs of the Seva Pratishthan as a whole.

The Pratishthan has *four wings* through which it operates its humanitarian services to the general public: (i) the 550-bed general hospital, (ii) the Nursing School training GNM nurses not only for its own hospital but also for nursing services in other hospitals at large, (iii) the Vivekananda Institute of Medical Sciences (VIMS) to promote post-graduate teaching and research work in various branches of medical sciences, and (iv) last but not the least, the Community Health Services (CHS) for the rural poor.

The Hospital

Of the available 550 beds, 475 are being utilized at present on account of administrative reasons. Fifty-three beds are in separate cabins and the rest are in general wards.

The total number of patients treated by the sixteen major departments is in the neighbourhood of 3.5 lacs per annum. The main departments and units are: Medicine, General Surgery, Obstetrics & Gynaecology, Paediatric Medicine, Paediatric Surgery, Orthopaedics, Urology, Ophthalmology, ENT Surgery, Dentistry, Maxillofacial Surgery, Dermatology, Physiotherapy and so on.

Besides, the *Department of Medicine* holds special clinics in the following spe-

cializations: Neurology, Cardiology, Nephrology, Psychiatry, Diabetes, Gastroenterology, Endocrinology, Haematology and Haemodialysis. The *Department of Paediatrics* also runs special clinics for Thalassemia and Immunisation. The *Department of ENT Surgery* runs a special clinic for disabled children for hearing and speech therapy. Besides, a separate *Post-Partum and Family Planning Unit* is run with its own operation theatre. The hospital has a separate *OT Complex* having ten operation theatres on the same floor for various surgical disciplines.

For diagnostic investigations, fairly well-equipped laboratories are available in-house in Radio-diagnosis, Pathology, Biochemistry and Human Genetics. A Blood Bank and Infusion Fluid Department have been added for enhanced quality of service.

The recent addition of a *whole-body C.T. Scanner* (at a cost of Rs. 105 lakhs) formally inaugurated by Sri Jyoti Basu, Hon'ble Chief Minister, Government of West Bengal, and of the *Tread Mill ECG* and *Holter Monitor* is an improvement to the diagnostic facilities erstwhile available. This became possible through substantial donations received from M/s Jindal Trust, the Planning Commission and other donors.

In keeping with the original character of the Pratishthan as expressed by the name 'Sishumangal' at its inception, its *child-friendly image* has been carefully nurtured over the years even after its growth into a general hospital. Comprehensive child-care is given through full-fledged *Department of Paediatrics* having a separate *Neo-Natal Unit* with special referent to the neo-nate in distress, paediatric surgery handling life-threatening cases requiring correction of deformities, a *Well-baby Clinic* to look after post-natal babies upto one year old with encouragement to mothers to breast-feed



Fig. 13 Waiting for Immunization at the Well-Baby Clinic

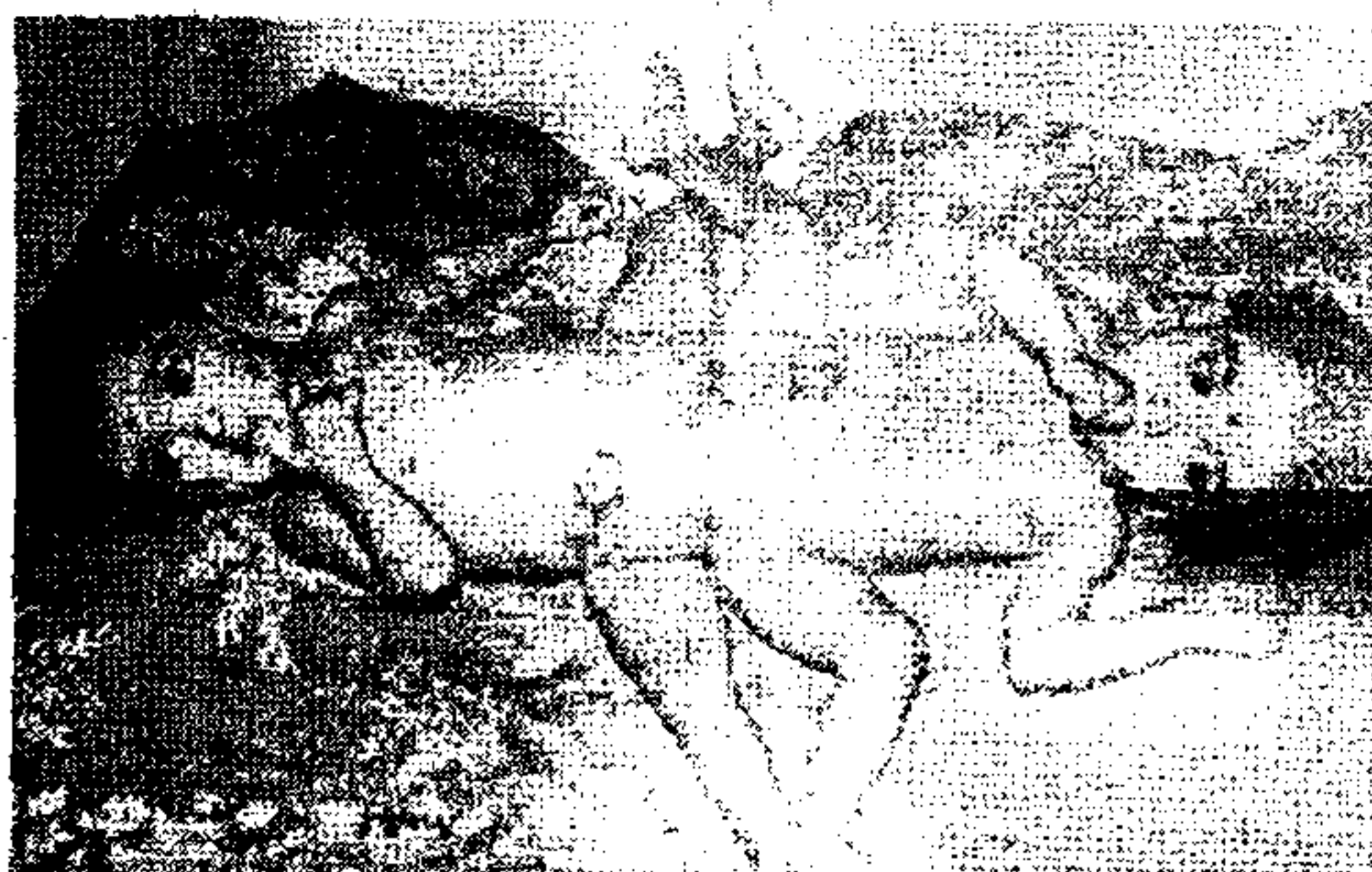


Fig. 14 Conjoint twins 'Ganga-Jamuna' before separation



Fig. 15 'Ganga' and 'Jamuna' after surgical separation living happily now as young adults

their babies along with a comprehensive immunisation programme for children upto 5 years of age administered through the *Post-Partum Unit*, as well as *general medical treatment* of children upto 14 years of age. A degree of excellence in these services having been reached, the Seva Pratishthan has now earned the distinction of being recognized by the World Health Organization as a '*Baby-Friendly Hospital*', one of the very few in Eastern India.

The hospital is proud to have a galaxy of renowned medical professionals serving in the OPD and Indoor patients department in honorary capacity, assisted by a large contingent of qualified resident doctors providing vigilance round the clock.

With a view to increasing operational efficiency, a *Computer* has been installed in the Accounts Department with service stations at Medical Stores and the Cash Office so far, at a cost of Rs. 45 lakhs (approx.), met by a substantial grant from the Planning Commission and hospital funds.

The hospital has a *central kitchen serving about 1000 inmates including hospital patients*, morning and evening, and other facilities like a *steam laundry with autoclaves*, etc.

Efforts are specially directed to serve the poor and low-income groups with free or part-free treatment. Twenty per cent of available beds are reserved for free patients while some others receive treatment partly free. *Hospital rates are subsidized for benefit to all*. As a result, the Pratishthan perennially suffers from financial stringency, with income from fees and charges, public donations and limited Government grants together falling short of the ever-increasing expenditure.

The hospital *Blood Bank* organizes voluntary blood donation camps at regular intervals with a view to providing quality

blood to hospital patients at moderate and affordable costs. The Pratishthan also runs a *Captive Infusion Fluid Unit* to supply the hospital fluid requirement without any fear of infection sometimes inherent in supply from outside sources. *Free Eye Operation Camps* are also organized by the hospital in various rural areas every year.

The School of Nursing

The Institution's School of Nursing, engaged in training Midwives since 1932, has since grown into a large residential unit on the hospital campus imparting a 3-year General Nursing and Midwifery Course to about 250 young girls, mostly inducted from poor and low-income families, on successful completion of the Higher Secondary Examination. They receive free board and training with some pocket money every month. The State grant available for the upkeep of some category of these students is quite inadequate in the face of rising costs over the years. The Pratishthan is trying to meet this gap through public donations credited to a separate Nursing School account and has now been able, to a considerable extent, to make the School a self-sustained unit in the economic sense.

The school building houses the Nurses' Hostel, a library and well-equipped physical demonstration rooms.

The Vivekananda Institute of Medical Sciences (VIMS)

Established in 1963 as a postgraduate Teaching and Medical Research Institute, it is recognized by the University of Calcutta, the Medical Council of India, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), and the University Grants Commission (UGC). The Institute conducts diploma courses in Child Health (DCH), Gynaecology and Obstetrics (DGO), Ophthalmology (DO), Oto-Rhino-Laryngology (DLO). Postgraduate degree students are also seconded to the Institute by

the Calcutta University for MD in Gynaecology, MS in General Surgery, MD in Paediatrics and ms in Ophthalmology. Besides, certificate courses for technicians are also conducted in Radio-diagnosis, Pathology, etc.

Various research projects are also conducted here under ICMR and Department of Science and Technology, Government of India, with significant contributions made in a number of branches of medical science over the years.

The institution has a medical library with more than 2600 reference books and a large number of medical journals. It also publishes its own medical journal.

Community Health Service

The Pratishthan has extended its medical services to urban slum areas adjacent to the hospital and also to rural areas in South 24 Parganas district to benefit the rural and urban poor as well as to provide training to student nurses in Community Health programmes.

A mobile medical unit attached to the Community Health Service, with doctors and nurses in the team, visits Sarisha Centre (40 km from the hospital) twice a week covering 23 villages having a population of about 10,000 and provides free treatment to about 300 patients daily. The critically ill patients are referred to the main hospital for treatment as and when necessary. Free eye camp is held every year for patients from areas served by the mobile unit. At Sarisha,

a School Health Programme, covering about 3000 students, has also been taken up. A mothercraft class is also held there once a week. Regular antenatal check-up is carried on in which high-risk mothers are identified and referred to the Pratishthan. Immunization programme against Polio, Measles, Diphtheria, Whooping Cough and Tetanus is implemented for children in these rural areas. In 1995-96 the mobile unit served 42,812 patients.

Conclusion

Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan as a branch centre of the Ramakrishna Mission, Belur, has the unique distinction conferred on it to run the largest general hospital (550 beds) among the other medical centres in the country attached to the Math and Mission. Over the years, poor patients and those from the less-privileged sections of the community including middle-class families have developed an affinity and a distinct preference for services rendered by the Pratishthan without regard to caste, creed or religion in conformity with the ideals of the Math and Mission. It has to be admitted with a sense of regret, however, that the decline in moral and ethical values in our society and community at large has also affected the standard of services of the Pratishthan at various levels (leaving an increasing scope for improvement in efficiency and rendering quality services with a human touch). This is of immediate concern to the present management apart from the persistent financial worries. □

The realization of one's identity with Brahman is the cause of liberation from the bonds of *Samsāra*, by means of which the wise man attains Brahman, the One without a second, the Bliss Absolute. Once having realized Brahman, one no longer returns to the realm of transmigration. Therefore one must fully realize one's identity with Brahman.

—*Vivekacūdāmaṇi*, śloka 223-4.

Vedanta in Cyberspace

THE VEDANTA MOVEMENT AND THE ELECTRONIC FRONTIER

PRAVRAJIKA VRAJAPRANA

There are many to whom Vedanta is not well known. There are equally many who are not so familiar with the benefits of computers. Vedanta is the product of the best human minds which probed the mystery of the universe and found a spiritual unitary basis underlying all apparent phenomena. Computers are a product of science, which first used for number crunching, have now become indispensable in the lives of many. Today, Internet has become a common word, with much potential for communication and sharing of information. This lucid article discusses the application of this potential to the spread of Vedantaic ideas. Religion, especially Vedanta, has entered the Cyberspace in a big way. It has become a popular area of visitors to the various Web sites. But as rightly observed by the learned author, a nun of the Sarada Convent, 'like almost everything else in this world of maya, the Internet has both good and bad points.... We in the Vedanta movement now have the choice either to use it as a means of spreading the message of Vedanta or to ignore it—perhaps at the peril of the Vedanta movement's future growth.'

As we begin the countdown to the millennium, several unmistakable trends in American society are increasingly making their presence felt. The first and most obvious is the electronic revolution which is profoundly changing the way we live. The second glaringly obvious fact: America is in the midst of a religious revival. Both trends have been analyzed and discussed to the point of fatigue, so there is little point in belaboring either their existence or their scope in these pages. What concerns us here is how these two powerful, parallel movements intersect and how their convergence affects one another. More importantly, we should examine what this convergence means for the Vedanta Movement's future growth and viability—in America as well as worldwide.

But to have a worthy discussion, we first need to clarify our terms. Although we have all heard of computers and the Internet, most of us—even those of us who use computers—don't fully understand what they do or what their potential is.

What, for example, is 'cyberspace'? The term 'cyber' comes from the '60s term, 'cybernetics', which means the science of computers. 'Cyberspace' refers to the place—the virtual locality—we inhabit when we use the Internet. You may notice that the title of this article does not speak of 'American Cyberspace' or 'Indian Cyberspace' because such a thing does not exist. Cyberspace cannot be boxed in: the Internet is global and borderless. But before we get into the Internet, let's back up a few paces and look at the Internet's home village: computers.

Computers are a recent invention, created only fifty years ago for US military purposes. Enormous machines that crunched numbers first for government then later for corporate and educational uses, computers lived in a rarefied, dust-free world that seemed to have little in common with the daily bedlam most of us inhabit. Then everything changed when a couple of kids—Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak—built the first personal computer in a wooden box in Job's parents' garage in the Silicon Valley (before

it was called the Silicon Valley). The year was 1976 and the big corporations and other Powers That Be declared that there was neither need nor use for personal computers. Undaunted, the two wonder boys incorporated and thus the Apple personal computer was created and introduced to the public. Slowly but very surely the little creatures ingratiated themselves into the fabric of daily existence. The Apple corporation created the hugely successful Macintosh computer and a chastened IBM rushed personal computers into the marketplace. Inexpensive clones of the latter promptly appeared; personal computers were no longer the toys of the gentrified set: they were cheap, fast, and highly addictive. They did our finances; typed our letters; created our stationery; organized our schedules as well as our addresses, telephone numbers, and recipes; they were our partners for chess and bridge; they provided video games for our entertainment. Personal computers accelerated from luxuries to necessities: soon grammar and high schools, colleges, and universities began to install them as basic educational equipment. Children demanded their own computers to help with their homework (and they also wanted their own video games).

Were these changes not dramatic enough, another, little-noted development at four American West coast universities in 1969 was to prove to be one of the most far-reaching of the century. At the time it seemed fairly innocuous: in order to share data, the four universities connected their computers to one other. This mild innovation was to become the prototype of the Internet. Then in 1991, CERN—the European Laboratory for Particle Physics in Geneva, Switzerland—developed the World Wide Web which allowed the exchange of information across the Internet through the use of ‘hypertext’ (more on that later) documents. And the rest, as they say, is history.

Although governments, educational

facilities and corporations have had their own uses for computer and Internet technology, no government controls the Internet and no private corporation owns it. A dictator’s nightmare, the Internet is a study in creative anarchy. This is not to say, however, that a particular country’s laws do not apply to its resident computer owner. The Dalai Lama, for example, has a popular Web site in America. No problem here. If, however, a person in Tibet ‘downloads’—that is, transfers a file from the Internet to his or her own home computer—that Tibetan will probably be in hot water if he or she is discovered.

What exactly *is* the Internet (or simply the Net) and what is the World Wide Web—abbreviated as WWW and otherwise simply known as the Web?

The Internet is a worldwide collection of computer networks that are interconnected with one another through high-speed connections. This wildly disparate collection is a bubbling cauldron of private, public, commercial, and educational networks that share information with one other. The Internet is also called the Information Superhighway since anyone connected to it can find information, or share information, on any imaginable (or unimaginable) topic. The World Wide Web is called the Web because it connects linked computers worldwide in a spider-like web that loops in and out of millions of computer networks at the speed of light.

How do the Net and the Web relate to one other? We can think of the Internet as being the total electronic universe—an extraordinarily large, complete circle: the whole pie of a pie chart. The largest proportion of that pie will be taken by e-mail or electronic mail. The second largest piece of the pie will be absorbed by the Web. The rest will be taken by news groups, chatrooms, and bulletin boards.

None of this, of course, is free. To con-

nect to the Internet, a person usually pays around \$20.00 per month in the U.S.—not including the initial software costs, etc. This situation will no doubt change in the near future: Internet access is becoming so critical that new computers will arrive at our doorsteps pre-equipped with Internet capability. 'According to one of the most comprehensive studies yet on Net usage,' says a recent article in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, 'the number of PCs [personal computers] hooked up to the Internet jumped 71 per cent over the past year to 82 million and is expected to more than triple to 268 million by 2110.... The percentage of PCs worldwide with Net access is expected to grow from 30 per cent today to more than 50 per cent four years from now.'¹ Why is the Internet so popular?

Once a computer is connected—'online'—it can 'talk' to every other connected computer in the world—assuming, that is, that the telephone infrastructure is adequate! Once online, a person can find a job, locate an out-of-print book, write a friend in Paris, order parts for a car or browse through the *New York Times* or the *Times of India*. A person can visit the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York or download the entire Pali Canon or the Bible.

One can also join a virtual diocese such as the one Bishop Jacques Gaillot created. Gaillot was bishop of a large diocese in Evreux, France, and in the early 90s spoke out fearlessly on a variety of controversial issues. His liberal views led him to be removed from the Evreux bishopric and he was given a new assignment: Partenia, Algeria. There are no Christians—let alone Catholics—in Partenia. Partenia, in the Sahara desert, is largely inhabited by lizards, scorpions, and a few stray Muslim nomads. But the intrepid Gaillot wasn't dismayed; he created a virtual diocese on the Web [<http://www.partenia.org>] where today he

continues to preach his own brand of Catholicism.²

The diocese of Partenia is but one intersection where spirituality and cyberspace meet. While the Internet has developed a reputation for being a receptacle for uncensored sleaze, spiritual topics, in fact, outnumber sex by a vast margin. Religion—in all its healthy, wild diversity—is one of the Net's most popular topics. As Time magazine's religion Web site [<http://www.GOD.com>] notes on its home page: 'Ask the Internet search engine Alta Vista to locate sites related to 'Sex', and it returns 683,643 documents. Request 'God' and it lists nearly three times as many: 1,772,945.' How is this relevant to our concerns?

One of the major problems with the Vedanta movement in North America is the paucity of Vedanta centers compared to the vastness of the land. Where India has a lack of infrastructure with telecommunications, America has a lack of infrastructure with Vedanta centers. There are currently nineteen official Vedanta centers (excluding subcenters and unofficial centers) in North America—the majority clustered on the two coasts. Most of North America's vast expanse remains without a Vedanta center, and most of North Americans have little or no access to information about Vedanta, Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda or Sri Sarada Devi.

Until now, through the Internet. The Internet brings the message of Vedanta into any home that has an online computer. How? All a person has to do is to type in some very general words—'Vedanta', 'Ramakrishna', 'Vivekananda', 'Sarada'—any one of those words, and a list of Web sites will appear on the computer screen.

A close look at the Vedanta Society of

1. Jon Swartz, 'PCs Plugging into Internet at a Furious Rate', August 21, 1997, pp. D1-4.

2. Jeff Zeleski, *The Soul of Cyberspace* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), pp. 2-5.

Southern California's Web site will show what possibilities there are for having the message of Vedanta reach around the world. Constructed in 1997, the Vedanta Society of Southern California's Web site was our Center's contribution to the Ramakrishna Mission's centenary celebration.

The first thing you notice when you click open the Web site is the Seal of the Ramakrishna Order: radiantly beautiful, the white swan rests upon variegated blue waters backed by an azure horizon and a rising, deep-orange sun. But the Seal is more than just a pretty face: it is hyperlinked. The word sounds worse than what it is. We've seen the word 'hypertext' earlier: it's a distinguishing characteristic of the Web. Hypertext is a word or words which appear in a Web site and are connected—'linked'—to other texts, thus allowing the reader to roam through various parts of the text and read in a non-linear way. Hypertext is generally underlined so you can distinguish it from the rest of the text. The Seal of the Order is hyperlinked: this means that when you click the mouse on the Seal's icon, a whole new page of material pops up on the screen. This page is entitled 'Seal of the Ramakrishna Order' and it explains the Seal's imagery and meaning.

'Welcome to the Vedanta Society of Southern California's Web Site' the home page announces; it is followed by a quotation from Schopenhauer:

In the whole world there is no study so beneficial and elevating as that of the Upanishads. It has been the solace of my life, and will be the solace of my death. By the time this article is printed [in the January 1998 issue], that quote will be gone and another introductory quotation will be displayed.

Why so much emphasis on change? A Web site may appear interesting the first few times you visit it, but after repeated viewings the site will begin to feel stale. If it is

boring, people will stop looking at it. To counterbalance cyber-tedium, the material is continually updated. The lecture schedules posted by the Vedanta Society of Southern California [<http://www.vedanta.org>] are changed every month and the site itself is continually reassessed for effectiveness: new 'links' (more on that later) are assessed and the text is continually re-examined for accuracy and general appeal.

Thwarting cyber-boredom is but one reason why sites need frequent refreshing. Another significant point is that if a site remains static for months on end, you get the distinct impression that no living human being is on the other side of the computer line. Part of the Web's attraction lies in the fact that you're contacting not only different people's interests and philosophies, you're also contacting the people themselves. Nearly every Web site is interactive: it usually has an e-mail address for reader input with other features to allow readers a direct and personalized response.

Brevity, Shakespeare said, is the soul of wit. It is also the soul of a home page since the Web site's *raison d'être* should be stated there as succinctly as possible. 'Vedanta,' says the Vedanta Society of Southern California's home page, 'teaches that our real nature is divine, that the true object of human life is to unfold and manifest this divinity, and that truth is universal. Vedanta accepts all the religions of the world and reveres the great prophets, teachers, and sons of God, because it recognizes the same divine inspiration in all.' This Vedanta-in-a-nutshell hopefully sparks enough interest to keep the viewer reading further. This brief introduction is followed by an equally brief paragraph on the Vedanta Society of Southern California.

What surely will catch the reader's attention is an elegant vertical line of blue boxes located directly beneath the Seal of the Order. These boxes provide the menu that offers the following selections: 1) Back-

A Representation of the Homepage

Vedanta Society of Southern California —Homepage

<http://www.vedanta.org/>



Vedanta Society

of Southern California

BACKGROUND

CALENDAR

WHAT IS
VEDANTA?

LITERATURE

WORLD WIDE
CENTERS

MONASTIC LIFE

RAMAKRISHNA
ORDER

CONTACT US

HOME

Welcome to the Vedanta Society of Southern California's Web Site.

"In the whole world there is no study so beneficial and elevating as that of the Upanishads. It has been the solace of my life, and will be the solace of my death."

Schopenhauer

Vedanta teaches that our real nature is divine, that the true object of human life is to unfold and manifest this divinity, and that truth is universal. Vedanta accepts all the religions of the world and reveres the great prophets, teachers, and sons of God, because it recognizes the same divine inspiration in all.

The Vedanta Society of Southern California was founded in 1930 and incorporated as a non-profit religious corporation in 1934. It maintains a temple, convent, and monastery in Hollywood; a temple, convent, and monastery in San Diego; and a Swami Vivekananda Memorial House in South Pasadena. There are sixteen other Vedanta Societies in the United States, Europe and South America. Although the societies are under the spiritual guidance of the Ramakrishna Order of India, each is an independent, self-supporting unit.

Vedanta Society of Southern California
1946 Vedanta Place
Hollywood, CA 90068
213-465-7114

Minister: Swami Swahananda
Assistant Minister: Swami Sarvadevananda
Ramakrishna Order of India

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ground; 2) Calendar; 3) What Is Vedanta? 4) Literature; 5) Worldwide Centers; 6) Monastic Life; 7) Contact Us; and 8) Home.

If you should click on the 'Background' bar, a brief history of the Vedanta Society of Southern California appears, along with short biographies of Swami Swahananda, the current head of the Center, and of Swami Prabhavananda, its founder. In this section the various Southern California Centers are underlined (hypertext again), thus giving the reader the option of seeing each location's descriptive page.

Let's say, however, that you don't really care about the Vedanta Society's background. You just want to find out what's happening at the Hollywood temple next Sunday. One click on the 'Calendar' section will bring up a calendar on the screen—much like the calendar that adorns most people's desks. Simply click on the date you have in mind—January 25, 1998, for example—and in the blink of an eye you will see who is speaking on what subject in all the Vedanta Society of Southern California locations.

Perhaps the following week you'll want to visit Santa Barbara; the lecture posted on the Web site looks interesting. But what does the Santa Barbara temple look like, and how do you get there? Click on the underlined words 'Santa Barbara Temple' (you guessed it: hypertext) and the Santa Barbara page appears on the screen with a beautiful color photo of the temple and a map showing how to get there. The same applies to all the Center's individual pages.

But now let's suppose you're in the middle of Arkansas—there's no Vedanta Center around *anywhere*, but a friend of yours who's a Vedanta devotee in Toronto has piqued your curiosity; you want to know more about it. The 'What is Vedanta' section is a good place to start. One quotation particularly touches you: "Find God.

That is the only purpose in life." Ramakrishna. Clicking Ramakrishna links you to the page devoted to Sri Ramakrishna; it also provides his clear photograph and a small section of his sayings. When you return to the 'What is Vedanta' site, you can read about 'the methods' where the four yogas (each yoga is hypertext) are discussed. Swami Vivekananda is another hypertext link, and again his photograph and quotations are provided on his page.

Maybe by now you're almost getting hooked. You want to study Vedanta more deeply, but you're stuck in the middle of Arkansas. Where can you go from here? Click on the 'Literature' box and a whole new world will open for you. The 'Literature' section suggests some introductory reading as well as offering the traditional scriptures along with books for specialized interests. Were you in Southern California, you could visit the three bookstores listed (with maps and photos) on the Web site. But since you're in Arkansas, the most practical idea is to click 'Vedanta Press/Vedanta Catalog' and order books through the mail.

Let's say you're interested in yoga; you've heard the word but don't know much about it. All you have to do is type 'yoga' into the labeled box and all the books that are about yoga will pop up on the screen; not only that, selections from the books are also included so that you can actually read from the books that interest you. In the near future, an audio capability will be added so that at the click of the mouse you'll be able to listen to selections from the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Raja Yoga*, and other texts. Unencumbered by geography, this cyber-bookstore is one of the most effective ways of spreading the message of Vedanta throughout the world; requests for Vedanta literature come from as far away as Iceland and Spain. Many people (over 1,600 as of this writing) have already visited the Vedanta Press/Vedanta Catalog site since it

was constructed, and the numbers will no doubt greatly increase as time goes by.

One of the most engaging features of the Vedanta Society of Southern California's Web site is its 'Worldwide Centers' section. Cleverly interactive, a map of the world appears on the screen. Click the mouse where you live on the planet and information on the Vedanta Center closest to you will appear on the screen. Included in this section is a listing of all the Southern California Vedanta Societies along with their histories, photos, and a map showing how to get to each location. A complete listing of the Vedanta Societies worldwide is given as well as an abbreviated listing of the Indian Ramakrishna Mission (with a wise notation that 'there are many other centers throughout India').

Let us now suppose that Vedanta philosophy has captivated your Arkansas heart and now you're contemplating making it your life. What are the possibilities? Click on the 'Monastic Life' box and you can weigh them for yourself. The first part of 'Monastic Life' addresses the question of what monasticism is: it then discusses Vedanta monasteries and convents—their stages, routines, and requirements. Highlighted in this section is a 'special program for college students'—a highly successful Vedanta Society of Southern California program which offers college students the opportunity to live and work at a monastery or convent for one to six weeks. Clicking the hypertext opens a page which gives details about the student program and the requirement involved—and even provides an application form!

An unusual and popular feature of the 'Monastic Life' section is its interactive 'Talk to a Monastic' page. 'Would You Like To Talk To A Monastic?' the page opens. 'Do you have questions relating to Vedanta Philosophy, Ramakrishna and his disciples, monasticism, or spiritual life in general?'

One of the nuns in our Santa Barbara convent answers most of these inquiries. (Inquiries from male college students interested are routed to Vedanta Press/Vedanta Catalog in Hollywood.) The questions often test the limits of one's knowledge and creative abilities. Often the inquirer is directed to contact the Swami at the Vedanta Center nearest to him or her; just as often the monastic responding to the e-mail answers the questions as clearly and judiciously as possible.

The page has proved how truly far-ranging the Internet is: one of the first inquiries came from a young man in Spain who requested information on the Vedanta Center closest to him. Today itself an English visitor who is participating in the 'monk for a month' student program visited the Santa Barbara temple. He had discovered the student program through the Internet by typing 'Vedanta' into his college computer and immediately located the Vedanta Society of Southern California's Web site. Only upon his departure for America did he discover that there was a Vedanta Center in England! He is happily anticipating visiting the Bourne End Center when he returns home.

Not surprisingly, the 'Talk to a Monastic' page has generated a large amount of electronic mail; also not surprisingly, the questions received have ranged from the peculiar to those deeply moving. 'I may not know much,' a young woman from Georgia wrote, 'but I know that understanding is not gained from books or colleges ... I need someone to tell me what makes life worth living.... Your Web site is wonderful, but I fell I'm at a crossroad [sic] and I need more. Actually I don't know what I need—maybe just to make contact with a real person that has realized more of the truth than I have.'

A man in Colorado wrote, 'I am writing out of great hunger [for] spiritual freedom. I have been seeking God ... for many years. I have a desire in my heart to help others and

to strive for unconditional love for my brothers and sisters, but I also have a great deal of anger and frustration in my heart and I usually fall far short.... If you can suggest any books that will be a good start, and are simple enough to learn from, I would greatly appreciate it. I will also give you my name and phone number and ask you to please pass it on to anyone you might know in my area.'

In contrast to such vivid earnestness, a woman wrote: 'Is there such a thing as living the monastic life, but still having married relationships, including sexuality within that context?' Another person wrote, 'What is your view on the foretold "shift in consciousness" which is supposed to happen very soon?' One person with a philosophical bent inquired: 'If Atman is pure and the jiva has impurities then what separates them?'

Other questions are more practical: One man, asking about meditation and initiation, wrote: 'How would I go about connecting with the Ramakrishna lineage of spiritual development?' Another wanted to know if he should make japa if he hadn't received a mantra from a spiritual teacher. One couple wrote to ask about information and guidance on *vanaprastha*; a student in Virginia asked how to study and experience Advaita; another person wrote asking how to integrate Vedanta and Native American spirituality. A young man wrote to say that he was interested in 'becoming more spiritual in daily living. Can you suggest some simple practices that I can follow?'

Some questions are more personal: An Indian student studying in an American graduate school wrote to say that he was suffering from anxiety and depression; he couldn't tell his parents and he needed someone to talk to. A Catholic monk in Washington wrote asking to dialogue with a Vedantic monastic, saying: 'my ... limited experience with Vedanta has been instrumental in deepening my own experiences within the Catholic faith.'

A young Muslim student, originally from Varanasi, wrote from New York where he is working on his Ph.D. in theoretical particle physics. Having studied Swami Vivekananda for fifteen years had greatly influenced him, and he wanted to spend a summer in a Vedanta monastery, he said. 'It has greatly been my wish to live in company of monks of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Order,' he wrote, 'and learn more about India's monastic heritage, learn meditation, etc.' He further volunteered to help with manual labor, computer assistance, etc.

One American sent a message from Japan, expressing great delight in discovering the Vedanta Society in Japan, the Nippon Vedanta Kyokai, through the Southern California Web site. She wrote in joyful detail about visiting the Center, meeting the Swami, and attending the lecture. (The Nippon Vedanta Kyokai now has their own Web site: <http://www.bekkoame.or.jp/vedanta>).

What is especially heartening about the Vedanta presence on the Web is that it particularly attracts (and is attractive to) young people. The world's youth are the most computer literate; they are the ones who spend the greatest time 'surfing the Net'—that is, visiting various discussion groups and Web sites. Very nearly all American schools have computers in the classrooms with Internet access. The next millennium will see schools across the globe wired together, thus making the world's 'global village' a virtual reality.

For those of us in the Vedanta movement in America, this fact carries profound consequences. For the movement here to grow and flourish, an influx of young people—both monastic and lay—is a necessity. Since the 60s most Vedanta congregations have seen a 'graying' in both the monastic and lay membership that hasn't been adequately balanced by younger recruits. The Web siren call to young people carries the

very real potential to ameliorate the situation. Interestingly, some of the Vedanta Society of Southern California's most promising young people who have shown a serious interest in monasticism have come via the Internet.

To return again to our menu of choices: The 'Ramakrishna Order' is another appealing blue box which invites further investigation. Clicking the box, a new page pops up, telling us: 'The Ramakrishna Order, with headquarters in Calcutta, is one of the largest and most respected religious orders in India today. The Order was inspired by the great Bengali saint, Ramakrishna.' We've already seen the page devoted to Sri Ramakrishna; part of the fun of a Web site is that through hypertext you can reach topics through various entryways. Thus while the biographies and photos of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, and Sri Sarada Devi (as well as the Seal of the Order) are actually located in the 'Ramakrishna Order' segment, you can reach it just as well through several other sections.

A few paragraphs down we read: 'There are over 140 official centers of the Ramakrishna Order, and many more unofficial, or unaffiliated ones.' Clicking on 'centers' hypertext will bring us again to the complete listing of the Vedanta Societies around the world including an abbreviated listing of the Ramakrishna Maths and Missions in India. The rest of the 'Ramakrishna Order' page is devoted to a brief discussion of the Ramakrishna Order: the Maths and Missions, their ideals and activities.

'Contact Us' is the last blue box before the 'Home' box. By clicking the 'Home' box, you simply return to the home page—the first page of the Web site—it's like going back to 'Home' in a Monopoly game. 'Contact Us' is another highly interactive section: it opens with: 'Please send your comments on this site to webmaster@vedanta.org.'

This is a different e-mail site from the 'Talk to a Monastic' page; comments on the site itself go to the Vedanta Society's 'webmaster'—a close devotee college student whose formidable computer skills allow him to make the Web site's frequent changes. 'Questions on Vedanta in general,' the page continues, 'should be directed to info@vedanta.org.' This e-mail address routes this kind of mail to yet another Santa Barbara nun. This makes a total of three different e-mail addresses through which reader response is encouraged.

Also included in the 'Contact Us' section is the 'Frequently Asked Questions' portion of the Web site. This spares both the reader and the monastic the trouble of having to repeatedly formulate the same questions and answers: At the top of the list is: 'Is Vedanta the same as Hinduism?' Other FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) are: 'Is Hinduism polytheistic?'; 'Why do some Indian gods and goddesses have so many arms?'; 'What is the law of karma?'; 'Is it possible to be reborn as an animal or plant?'; 'Do Hindus worship cows?'; 'Is it necessary to adopt Indian ways of dressing and Hindu food restrictions to be a Vedantist?'; 'If there is no devil, what about evil?'; 'Christ said, "No one shall enter the kingdom of heaven except through me." Aren't you worried about going to hell?'; 'If everything is an illusion, then what does it matter what we do?' These FAQs were formulated by an American Swami with much experience in answering questions from the general public. Those of us with similar public experience can attest to the fact that these really *are* the most frequently asked questions.

One of the Web site's most attractive features is the 'Links' section which appears in the 'What is Vedanta?' page (though it could just as easily have been nested any place else). We've already seen how hypertext links different sections within one Web site; but what is *really* interesting is how

hypertext can connect the reader to different Web sites altogether. In the 'Links' section of the Vedanta Society Web site, you can click on the words 'Links' and a box saying 'Select a topic' comes into view. Click on the box and a pull-down menu appears with the following headings: 1) Interreligious Studies; 2) Interreligious Dialogue; 3) Spirituality/Mysticism; 4) Bookstores; 5) Sacred Scriptures; 6) Advaita Vedanta; 7) Vedanta Yoga Teachers; 8) Hinduism; 9) Kali; 10) Yantra; 11) Ramakrishna-Vedanta; 12) Christianity; 13) Buddhism; 14) Islam; 15) Judaism; and 16) Other Religions.

You probably weren't expecting to find the Vatican's home page linked to the Vedanta Society's Web site, but there it is, listed as one of the several links under Christianity. The Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh's home pages are also there—two of the Buddhist links. You can see the Sringeri Math as well as read the *Global Hinduism* home pages; they are but two of the various Hinduism links. If you want to compare the Koran and Bhagavad Gita, you can do so by going through the Sacred Scriptures link. You can also read *Time* magazine's excellent home page [<http://www.GOD.com>] by going through the Interreligious link.

One of the Santa Barbara nuns had an unexpected surprise when she came across the 'Mysticism in World Religions' Web site [<http://www.digiserve.com/mystic>]. Clicking on the 'Hindu Mysticism' selection, she discovered what Sri Ramakrishna said about various spiritual topics by first clicking on the name 'Ramakrishna,' then choosing a topic from the menu: 'Desire,' for example, or 'Where to direct your mind.' By clicking on the latter topic you will read: 'The mind of the yogi is always fixed on God, always absorbed in the Self.' (p. 113) The page numbers cite, of course, the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. The underlined 'yogi' indicates that if you click on the word, you'll go to a different page. In this case, you'll find yourself in the 'Glossary' section where you

will be informed that 'yogi' is 'one who practices yoga.'

You can also find what the Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads, Abhinavagupta, Patanjali or Vasishtha have to say about 'Where to direct your mind' or any of the other various spiritual topics that are offered for further exploration. Hindu mysticism is only one section of this Web site: Jewish mysticism, Christian mysticism, Islamic mysticism, Buddhist mysticism, and Taoist mysticism are similarly investigated.

With its site originating in India, the Ramakrishna Mission [<http://www-in.daistech.com.rkmission>] can be found among the Ramakrishna-Vedanta links. The Mission's Web site is divided into two sections: The Ramakrishna Movement and the Ramakrishna Mission. The latter page offers a glimpse at its work in medical service, relief activities, educational services, etc. Several topics are in hypertext for further information.

The Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center in New York and the Vedanta Society of Portland are the two other Vedanta Societies in America that are online. The first Vedanta Society to move into cyberspace, the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center [<http://www.ramakrishna.org>] opens to a home page with a clear and lovely color photograph of the Center. A lecture schedule is posted as well as information about the Center and its history. The Portland Vedanta Society's Web site [<http://cyberhighway.net/~vedanta>] gives the lecture schedule along with a splendid history of the Center and some fine old photographs.

'Holy Mother's Cyber-Tantu' ('tantu' is the Sanskrit word for 'web') was created by a San Diego devotee and is dedicated to Vedanta philosophy—specifically the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda, with a special em-

phasis on Sri Sarada Devi. A look at this home page [<http://scescape.com/saradama>] shows how far creativity can have expression: the background behind the text bears a striking resemblance to a typical Bengali sari—textured white with a red border. You can't help but think of Holy Mother's sari when the page appears on the screen.

'What is Vedanta,' [<http://www.jvallabh/vedanta.html>] a Canadian Web site posted by a Toronto devotee, gives basic information about Vedanta while linking to other Vedanta Web sites. Were you to see only this site on the Net, you could still access all the other Vedanta Web pages plus their links.

The Vivekananda Foundation's Web site [<http://www.vivekananda.org>] is a real work of art. One of the most stimulating and attractive of the Vedanta Web sites, the Vivekananda Foundation's home page begins with a 'FREE Book Offer for Libraries'—offering a complimentary copy of *Living at the Source: Yoga Teachings of Vivekananda* to libraries, thus managing to touch both the reading public and the cyber-public in one stroke. We have to remember, however, that since a good Web site is always 'in progress', the home page that appears today will probably be different from the home page you will see when this article is printed. The same thing is true about the three synopses of Swami Vivekananda's lectures which are posted today. (You can, however, read what I'm seeing today by clicking on the 'Archives' icon to access the previously posted lectures.)

The Vivekananda Foundation Web site offers books, tapes, FAQs, IFAQs (just in case you're interested in Infrequently Asked Questions), suggested readings, and a biography (plus photos) of Swami Vivekananda. The Web site explains the purpose and goals of the Vivekananda Foundation and also

lists the Vedanta societies and bookstores. The Vivekananda Foundation anticipates using 'sound bytes' of Swamiji's lectures in the future: that is, by clicking on 'The Goal,' for example, you would be able to listen to a portion of the lecture being read by a trained reader.

The real jewel of the Vivekananda Foundation Web site is the 'Portals' section: clicking the icon, you are ushered into an exquisite antechamber offering three choices—three entryways—each one having the name of one of Swamiji's lectures. For the next three months [written in September 1997], the three entryways are: 'The Goal,' 'The Four Yogas,' and 'Immortality'. By the time you read this, the entryways will be different. If we walk through the 'Four Yogas' doorway, we'll find a succinct argument: 'These Yogas, though divided into various groups, can principally be classed into four; and as each is only a method leading indirectly to the realisation of the Absolute, they are suited to different temperaments.' A one-sentence summary of each of the four yogas is given, and each yoga (karma yoga, for example) is in hypertext. Click on the hypertext and another page appears with a full paragraph giving a more detailed explanation of each particular yoga. Within each paragraph, different words are in hypertext so anyone interested can click on the word for further information.

The Vivekananda Foundation's Web site has been quite popular, as is evidenced by 50,000 'hits' they have received—an average of 2,000 per month. ('Hits' does not refer to the actual number of people who have viewed the site, but rather to the number of files downloaded to visitors.) However it is defined, the Web site has been busy and appreciated. They have received many requests for information on Swami Vivekananda from all over the world: Slovenia, Finland, Quatar, Croatia, Norway, Poland, Tobago, Venezuela, New Zealand,

Kuwait—to give a small sampling of the far-flung locations which have ‘dropped in’ to the site. Perhaps not surprisingly, many of the visitors were from India.

A large number of those who sent inquiries requested the locations of various Vedanta Societies. More esoteric queries have also been sent: One person wondered how he was to get water to run through his nose as per Swamiji’s instructions. Others have volunteered their services: several people have offered their help to maintain the Web site and one person has already begun doing volunteer work at the Vivekananda Foundation.

A final word on ‘links’: we have discussed the sites with whom the Vedanta Society of Southern California has linked. But just because we link to a site—*Time* magazine’s ‘GOD.com’ for example—this does not mean that they link back to us. So while you can find ‘GOD.com’ by going into our Web site, you cannot find our Web site by going into ‘GOD.com’. Moreover, we have no idea of all the sites that *have* linked to us. Unless we are informed by the other Web site, there is no way to find out. Net etiquette (‘netiquette’) dictates that when you link to another Web site, you should inform them. Many have done so, but many, unfortunately, have not. Further, there is nothing that can be done to prevent even objectionable sites linking to us—such are the hazards of the nearly anarchic cybernetic universe.

While we’ve dwelt almost exclusively on the positive effects of computer technology, the shadow side of the world’s increased computerization needs to be addressed. There are powerful drawbacks inherent with increased technology and many difficult questions remain unanswered.

If, for example, we become aligned with a cyber-community, what happens to the human community surrounding us? Do we become less available to our fellow hu-

man beings as we concentrate more on the glowing screen in front of us? Do we seek it *because* it spares us the difficulties and confusions of human interaction?

Further, with the increased emphasis on knowledge, communication, and entertainment coming from inside the computer, what happens to our sense of reality, tenuous as it already is? One eerie example is a popular new software package that offers its owners a cybernetic pet dog. According to recent newspaper reports, those who ‘own’ their cyber-dogs become extremely attached to them: they can hardly wait to get home from work to boot up their computers so they can play with their pets. Owners can hygienically adore their dogs while playing catch on the screen—feeding, grooming, and otherwise caring for a computer image. All the fun without the messiness of reality. When the borders between reality and virtual reality become so blurred, what are the psychological and societal implications?

Another thorny issue is the radically nonhierarchical nature of the Internet. No site is above others; no site is given more precedence than others. Everyone is on an equal footing on the Net. But life, as we know, isn’t like that. Some things *are* more important than others. Some people *should* be listened to with more attention than others. Trivia competes with genuine value on a level playing field in cyberspace. A paradigmatic example: There is a ‘Ramakrishna’ bulletin board posting (with nothing posted inside since anything more than a few days old is removed). The ‘Ramakrishna’ site is sandwiched between the ‘Ralph Fiennes’ site (a fan club, one would presume) and the ‘rat fink’ (best not to presume at all). On the bulletin board index, all the sites flatten to a virtual equality.

Again, there are a large number of Hinduism sites on the Net, some scurrilous, some authentic: how can a person who lacks adequate background or judgment make a distinction between the two? Yet the ten-

dency is, to accept as truth whatever is posted on the Net—echoing Sri Ramakrishna's words about people believing whatever is written in the newspaper.

Even the very nature of Web site is problematic. If children become accustomed to reading hypertext—jumping from page to page, clicking on whatever word interests them—what effect will this have on linear reasoning? Further, if a child (or an adult, for that matter) becomes habituated to reading short bits and pieces, then clicking on something else when bored—will this not attenuate the person's power of concentration? Will such a person ever be able to read seriously and deeply?

So, like almost everything else in this world of maya, the Internet has both good and bad points. One thing we can say with a fair amount of certainty: computer technology and the Internet will not go away. The toothpaste will not go back in the tube; the genie will not go back in the jar. We in the Vedanta movement now have the choice either to use it as a means of spreading the message of Vedanta or to ignore it—perhaps at the peril of the Vedanta movement's future growth.

For our part in Southern California, we

have been truly heartened by the great amount of interest in Vedanta that has been generated by our Web site. There is no question that our presence on the World Wide Web has greatly enhanced our availability to the general public. This is particularly crucial for North America, but America isn't the only location to consider. Our Web site has been visited by people from Croatia, Israel, Bolivia, South Africa, Sweden, Mauritius, United Arab Emirates, Finland—and so on, and so on. Who could have predicted that someone in Iceland would want more information on Sri Ramakrishna? And in how many other lands will similar requests occur? The Internet holds great promise for the East also; many young people, having lost touch with their own traditions and fallen prey to the least elevating elements of Westernization, can touch base with their own spiritual heritage through the computer technology they prize.

We are encouraged enough to believe that through the Internet, many more people will discover the message of Vedanta and will find their lives transformed.

The Lord, as we know, works in strange and mysterious ways. It appears that He even works through the Internet. □

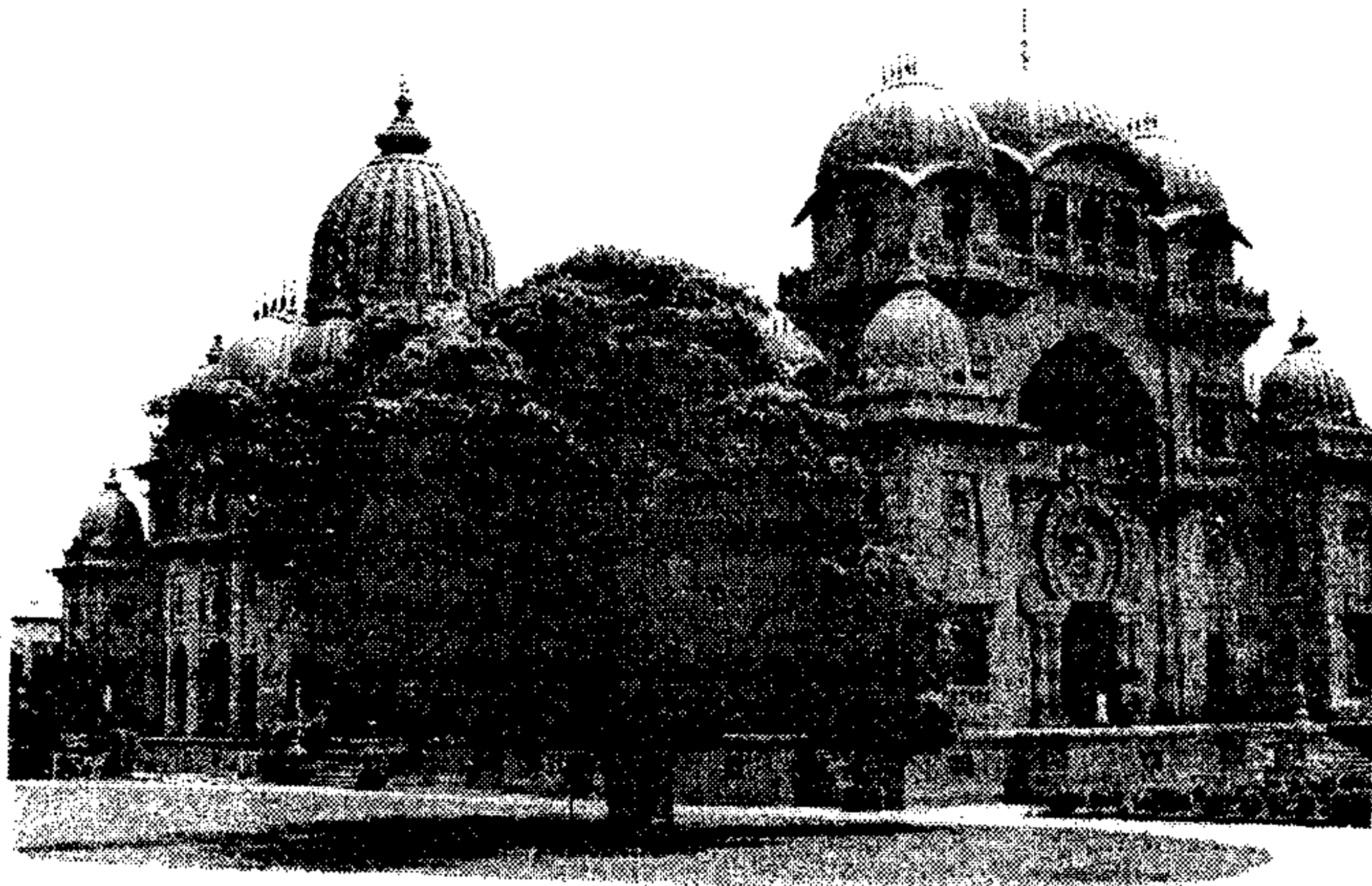
A FEW OF THE RAMAKRISHNA-SARADA-VIVEKANANDA-VEDANTA WEB SITES

Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta: E-mail	advaita@giasscl01.vsnl.net.in
Holy Mother's Cyber-Tantu	http://scescape.com/saradama
Mysticism in World Religions	http://www.digiserve.com/mystic
Nippon Vedanta Kyokai, Japan	http://www.bekkoame.or.jp/vedanta
Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta	http://www-in.daistech.com.rkmission
Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, New York, USA	http://www.ramakrishna.org
Vedanta Society of Portland, Oregon, USA	http://www.cyberhighway.net/~vedanta
Vedanta Society of Southern California, USA	http://www.vedanta.org
Vedanta Society of Toronto, Ontario, Canada	http://www.magic.ca/~vedanta
Vivekananda Foundation	http://www.vivekananda.org
What is Vedanta	http://www.jvallabh/vedanta.html

Ramakrishna Temple, Belur— A Symphony in Architecture

SWAMI TATTWAJNANANANDA

The author, a monk of the Ramakrishna Order and the Principal of Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha Shilpamandira, in this article brings out the many similarities between the architecture of the Ramakrishna Temple at Belur and other monuments over the globe. This symphony in architecture is both soothing to the eye and the mind, as well as uplifting. Earlier, in 1953, there appeared in Prabuddha Bharata (vol. 58, p. 16) an article on this theme by Sri C. Sivaramamurti. Udbodhan too, in its Chaitra 1378 (March 1972) issue, brought out an article of Sri Gopendra Krishna Sarkar on the temple and its constructional details. The present article is not a repetition and provides many illustrations to highlight the similarities between the Ramakrishna temple and the several monuments with which the comparison has been made.



*Ramakrishna Temple as one sees it from about 50 metres away:
Charming simplicity combined with an imposing facade comprising the entrance gate*

Ramakrishna Temple, Belur (or simply Belur Math) is a place of international pilgrimage significant due to the fact that Swami Vivekananda placed the relics of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa here and envisioned a unique temple to house them. Swamiji before his debut at Chicago had wandered about many historically important places of India looking for the signs of the greatness as well as for the reasons for the decline of her ancient culture. His pil-

grimage took him to many parts of Uttar Pradesh, Delhi, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, and he must have made profuse mental notes of his observations especially on ancient architectural monuments like the Taj Mahal, Fatehpur Sikri palaces, Diwan-I-Am, palaces of Rajasthan, temples of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, etc. During his tour in America and Europe, he must have come across buildings of ar-

chitectural importance—modern, medieval, Renaissance, Gothic, etc. To pay tribute to the multifaceted all-embracing divine personality of Sri Ramakrishna, he envisioned a great edifice combining various architectural features of monuments in various parts of the world. The idea was put into actuality by Swami Vijnanananda with the help of Martin Burn and Company, the then famous architect builders of Calcutta. Mr. Herald Brown of Martin Burn after discussion with Swami Vijnanananda on the drawings prepared by him stressed upon three points that Swami Vivekananda wanted to incorporate in this monument:

1. *Nātmandira* (Congregational Hall) and *Garbhamandira* (Shrine) should not be detached as in a Hindu temple but should be connected in a continuous space like that in a Christian Church.
2. Domical roof should top the *Garbhamandira*.
3. Architectural detailing should be like that in Hindu temples.

The Setting

As a visitor enters the Belur Math gate on the asphalted road to the temple, variety of old trees camouflage the temple from his sight till about a hundred metres away, from where he gets a partial glimpse of it. The site chosen for the temple by Swamiji is right on the holy river Ganges with a clear view of two important places related to Sri Ramakrishna—Dakshineswar and Cossipore, which add to its sanctity. In a spatial tribute to the Ganges, the temple has been located parallel to its flow, sufficiently away to avoid its water from entering during high tides. The vast green spaces on both sides of the temple and in the front with a back-drop of long simple Math office building, the Math library and residential quarters for monks complete its setting. Not far from it are the old shrine, the remodelled Math cottage housing the room where Swami Vivekananda spent his last days and where too

stayed many of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, and temples dedicated to Swami Brahmananda, the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda.

The simple but elegant pathway leading from the entrance gate bordered with a number of huge trees and the setting against the holy Ganges with the other bank silhouetted against the morning sun presents a contrast to formal settings of many ancient monuments of India like the Taj Mahal or the Victoria Memorial of Calcutta.

The Temple

The temple itself is built in limestone with parts of it in concrete. The light buff limestone has been traditionally used since the times of Ashoka the Great in northern India, especially in the Khajuraho temples and Rajasthan palaces as it is durable, soft enough to suit intricate carvings and is readily available. The Mughals used marble for their monumental buildings which however finds its place only in the elegantly inlaid black and white floors of this temple. The overall impact of the temple in perspective raised on a modest platform of about 1.75 metres is homely, decent and at the same time elegant.

Entrance

What a visitor is struck by when he stands in front of the temple is its facade which reminds one of a South Indian *Gopuram* gate (Fig. 1), the difference being that the *Gopuram* entrance gates usually used to be away from the main temple while the huge *Gopuram*-like gateway here is attached to the temple and is composed of grand arches, *chattris* and domes with a height and width which dwarfs the *natmandira* behind.

The entrance has various elements which remind one of ancient Indian architecture in its various phases. The pavilions at the top suggest the contours of the roof

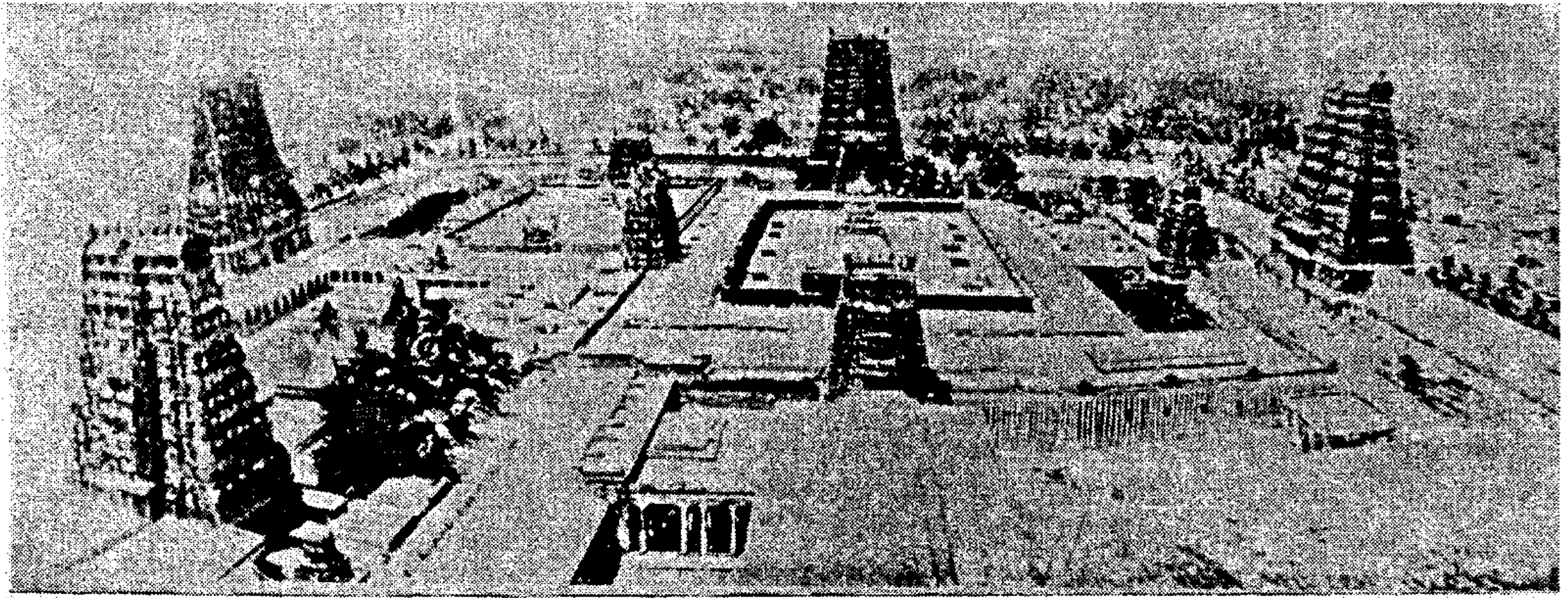


Fig. 1 Perspective view: Great Temple at Madhura, Tamil Nadu. It may be noted that the Gopurams (entrance gates) are away from the main temple, many in number and in different directions



Fig. 2 Jodhpur Palace: With its chattris (literally umbrellas) and pavilions with semicircular chajja cantilever projections. Note the similarity with the skyline of front facade (as shown in title figure)

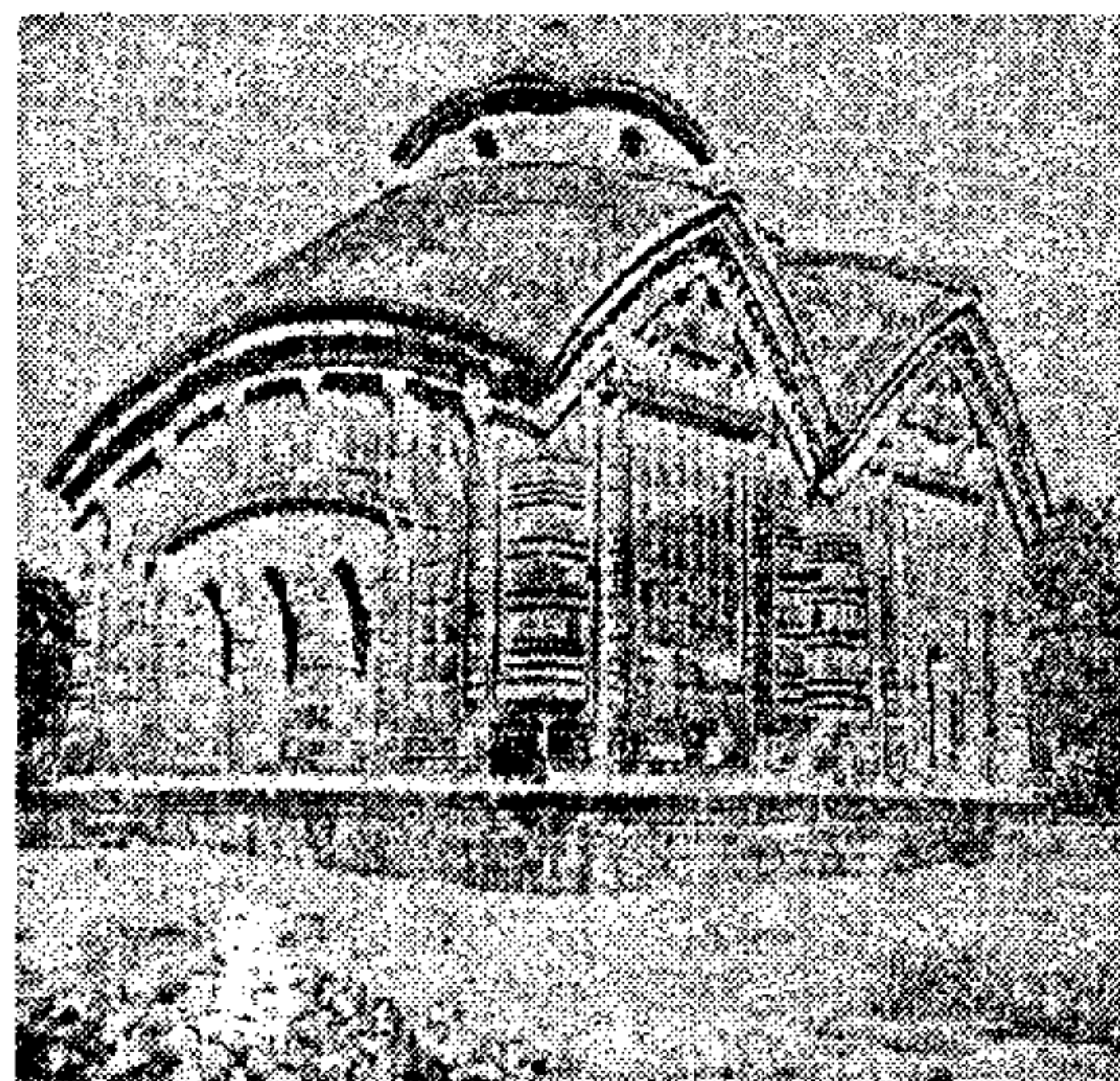


Fig. 3 Bengal Temple: Vishnupur 18th Century. Note the curvatures of the roof and its similarity with the curvature of chattris and pavilions of Ramakrishna Temple (title figure) as against the semicircular curvatures of chajja projections in Fig. 2

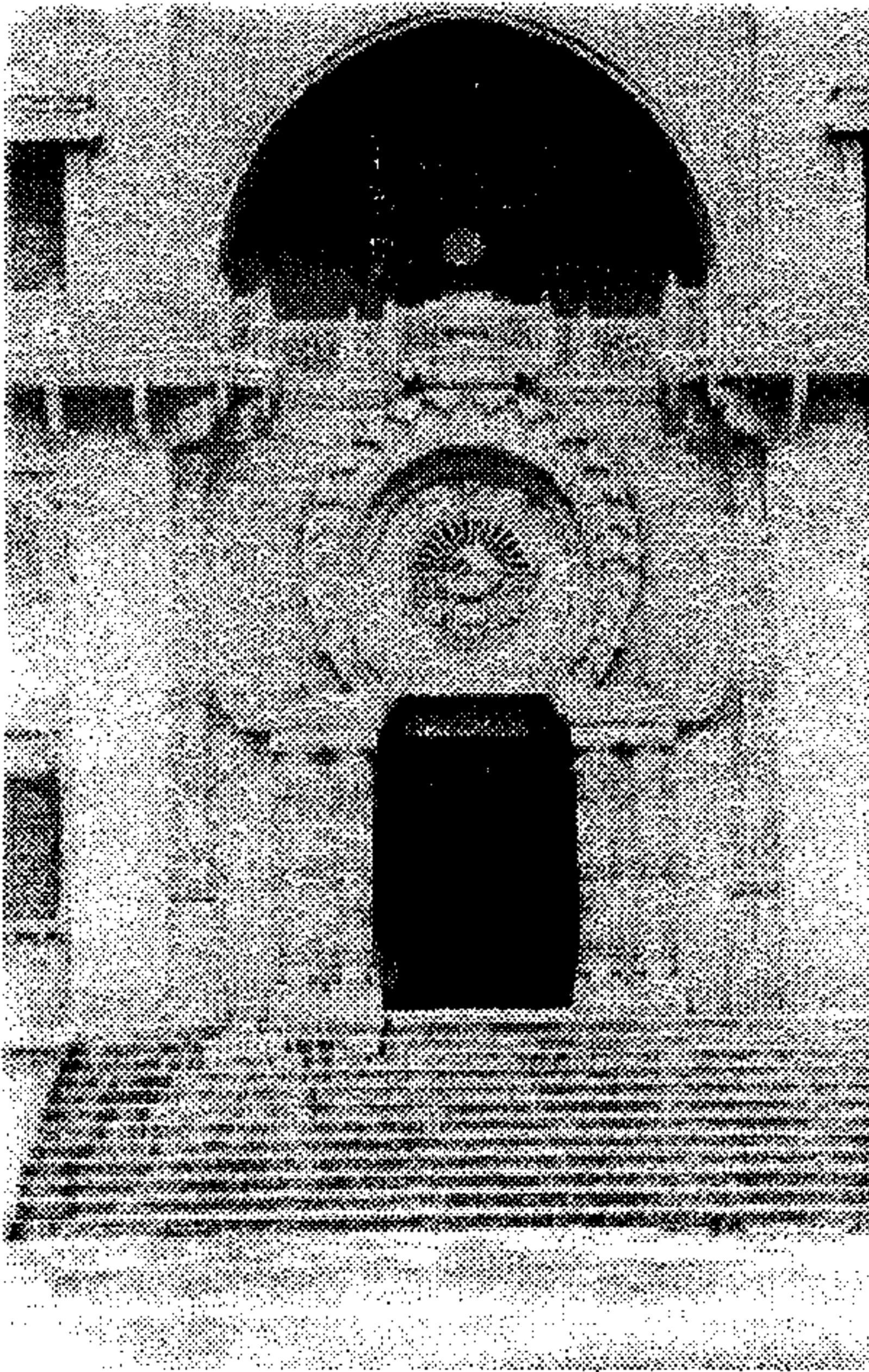


Fig. 4 Entrance: The rectangular entrance with pairs of columns on sides, a horse-shoe arch with scroll ending above and a pointed arch on top

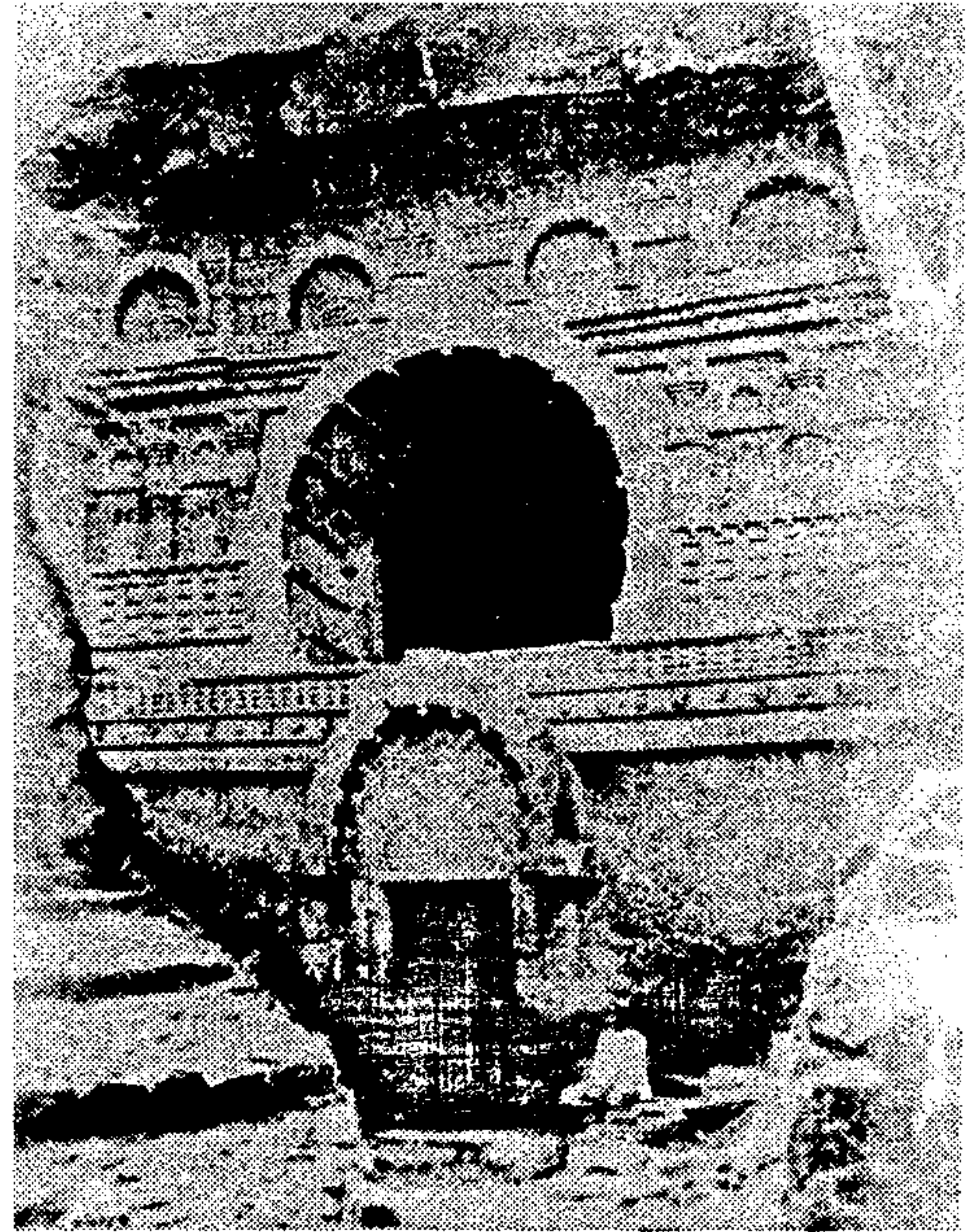


Fig. 5 Entrance of Nasik Pandulena Chaitya Hall: First century BC. Note its rectangular entrance with horse-shoe arches above

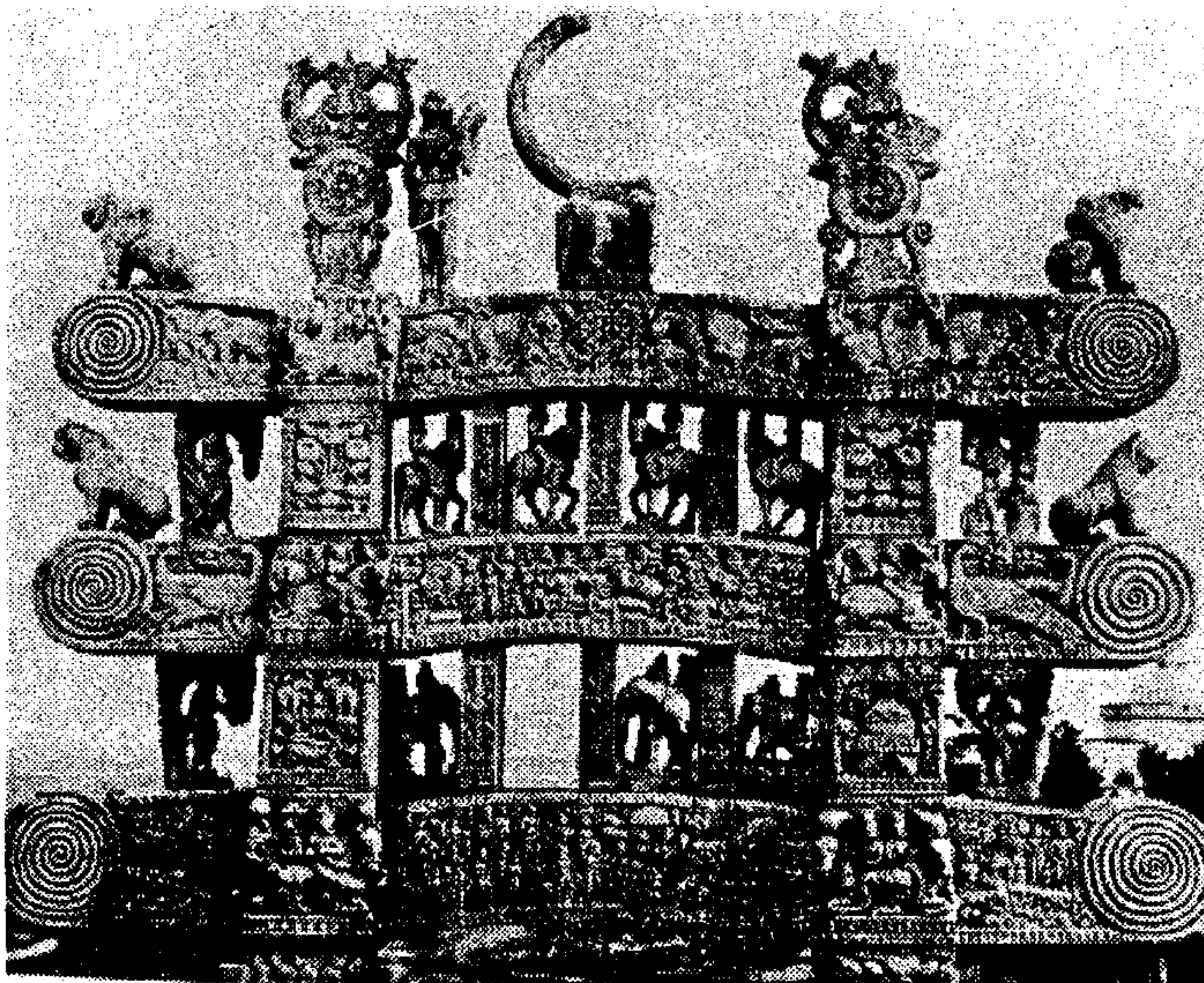
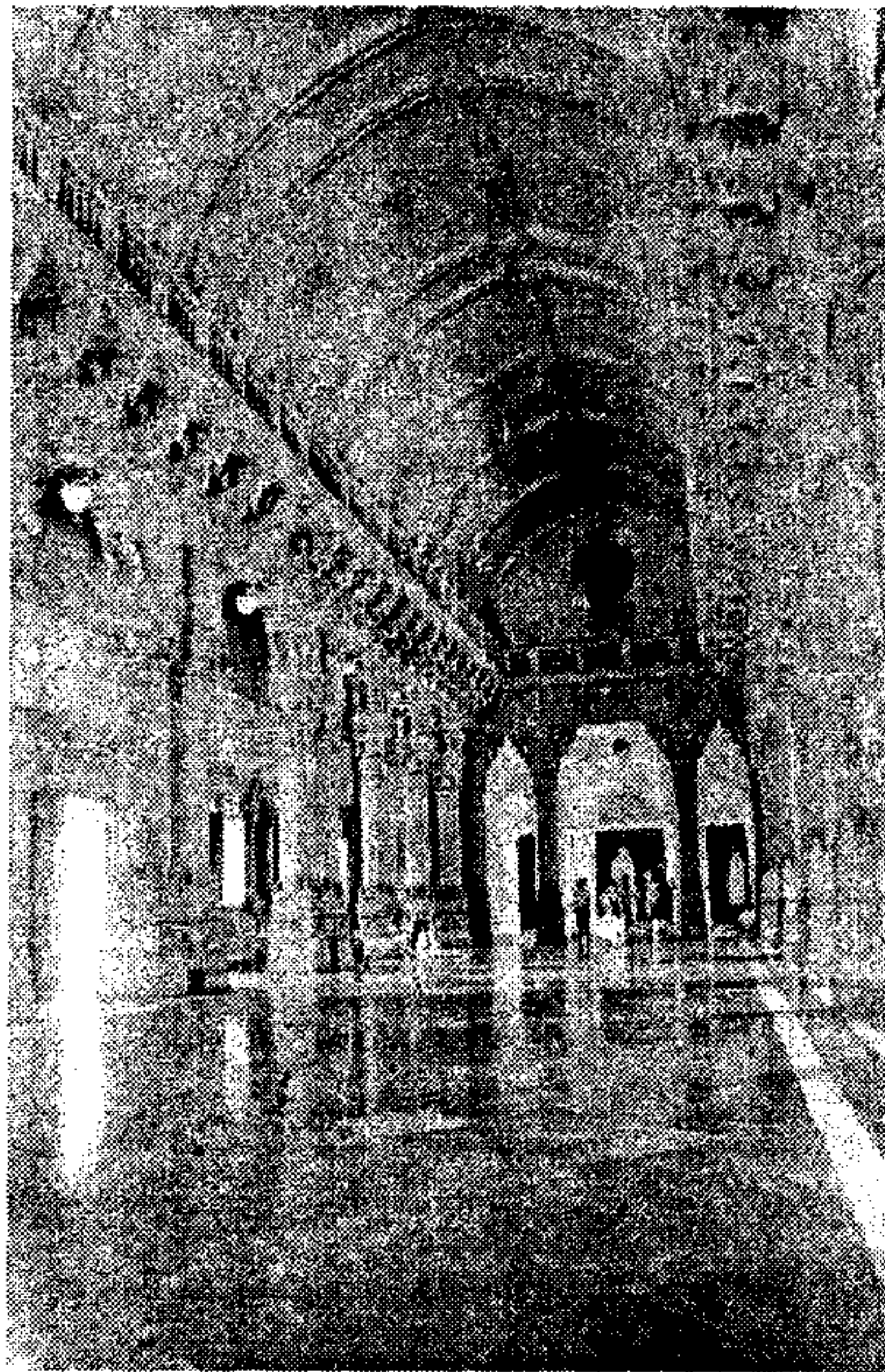
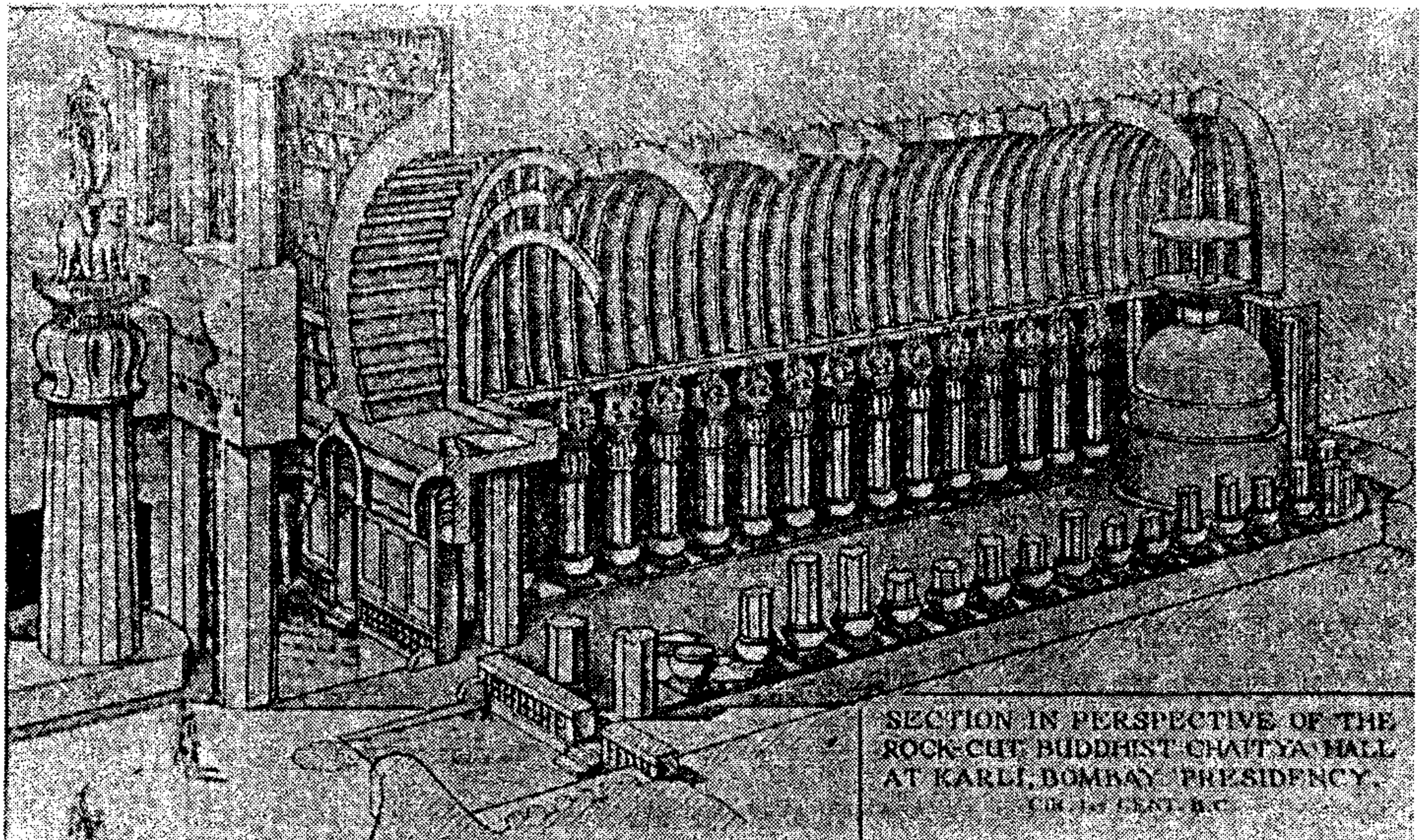


Fig. 6 Sanchi, Bhopal: Northern Gateway of Great Stupa, First century BC. Note the three horizontal curviform architraves with spirally rolled ends



*Fig. 7 Ramakrishna Temple: Interior perspective in the nave (central part) of the congregational hall.
Note the rows of columns, brackets, balcony and curved ceilings.
Note also the similarity with the columns in the Rock-cut Buddhist Chaitya Hall as shown in Fig. 8*



*Fig. 8 Section in perspective of Rock-cut Buddhist Chaitya Hall, Karle, Maharashtra (First century BC.)
Note the rows of columns and the round ceiling with ribs, the nave and the aisles on side and the Stupa at the circular end*

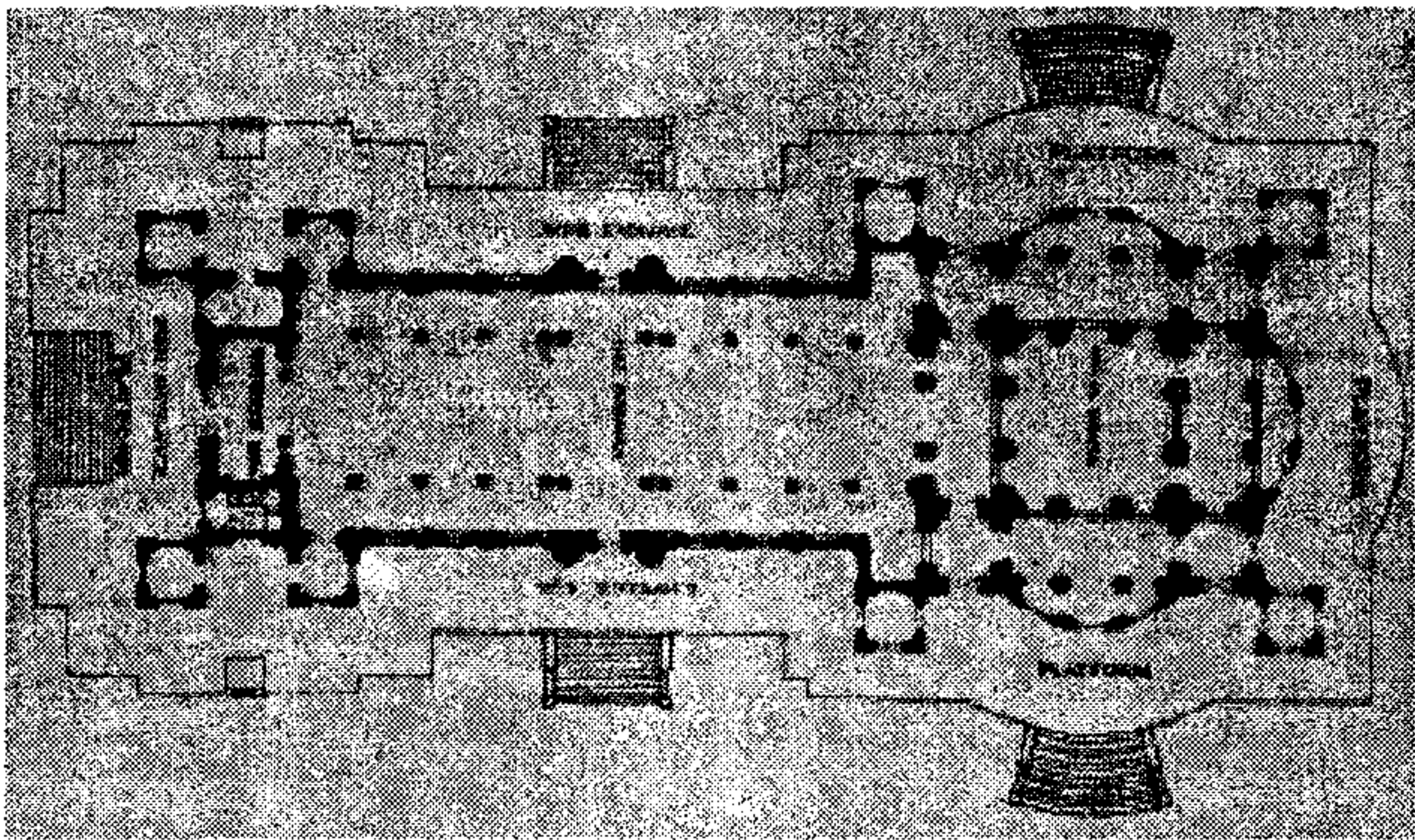


Fig. 9 Plan of Ramakrishna Temple. Note the continuous space flowing from Natmandira to Garbhamandira, its similarity with Christian Church plan (Fig. 10) and dissimilarity with Hindu Temple (Fig. 11)

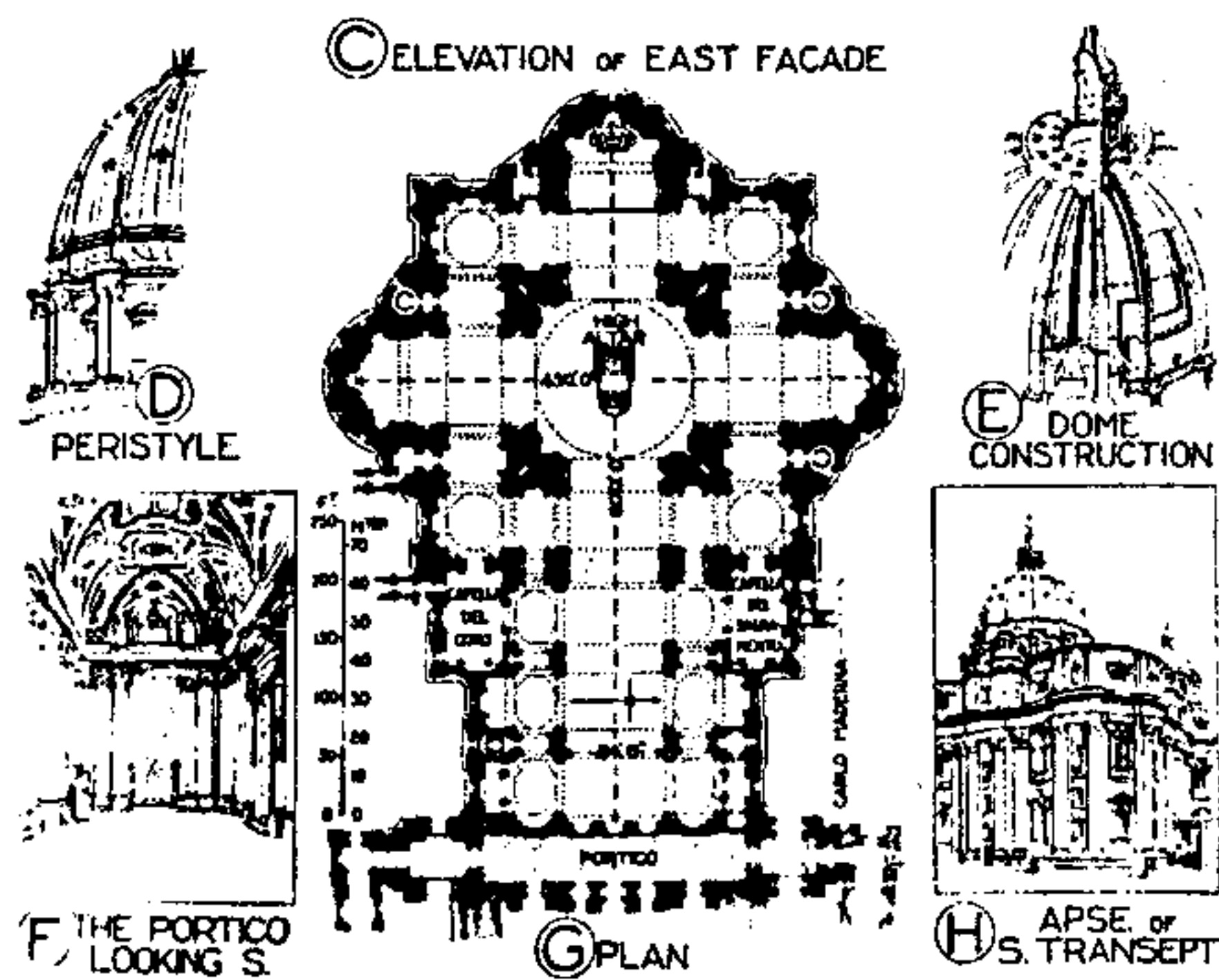


Fig. 10 Plan of St. Peter's, Rome. Italian Renaissance (AD 1600). Note the central nave with side aisles of congregational hall flowing into the altar and around (circumambulation)

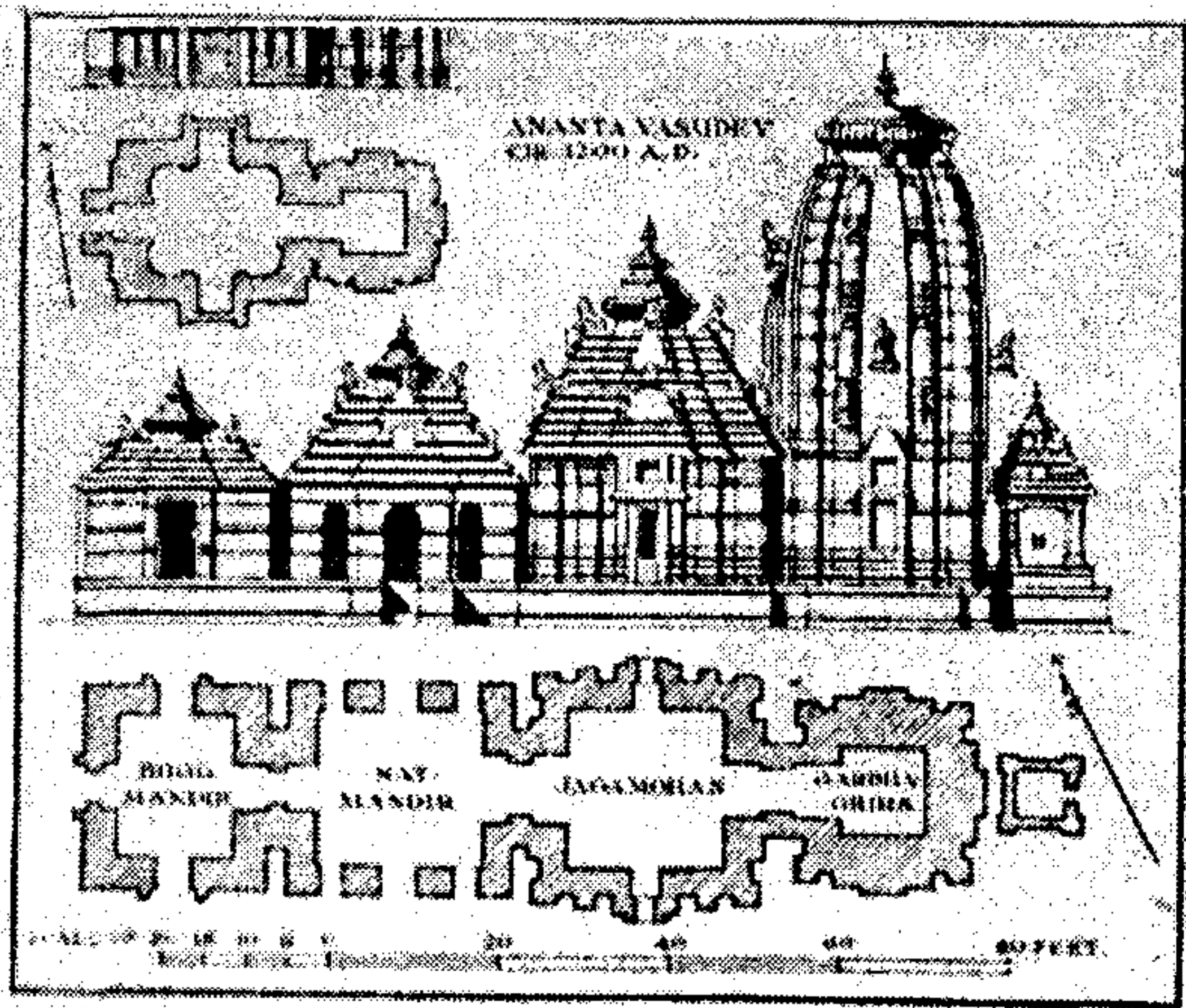


Fig. 11 Hindu Temple: Ananta Vasudev, AD 1200. Bhubaneswar, Orissa. Note the Garbhagriha with no openings; a narrow connection with the Jagamohan and Natmandir

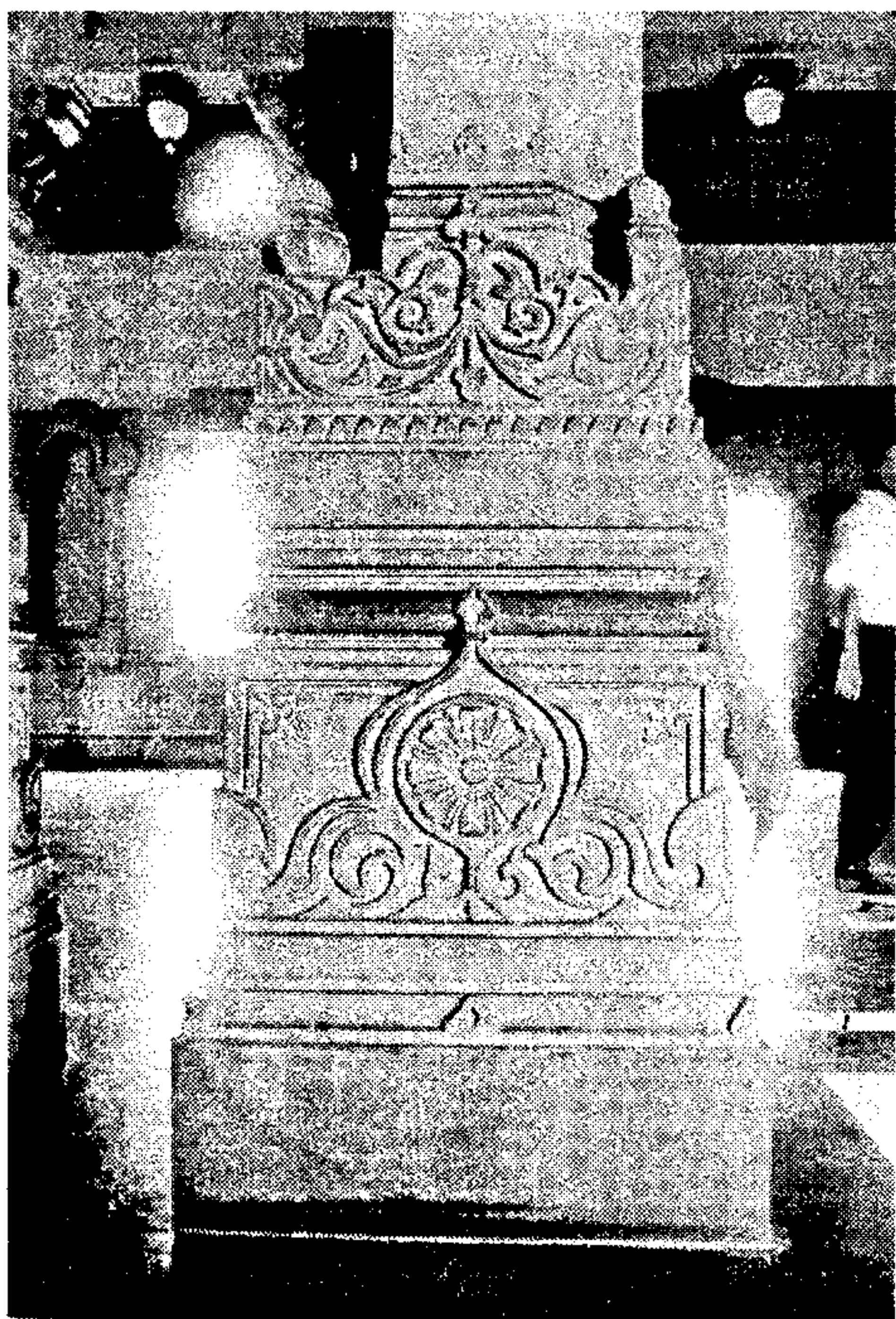


Fig. 12 A column base with flower design

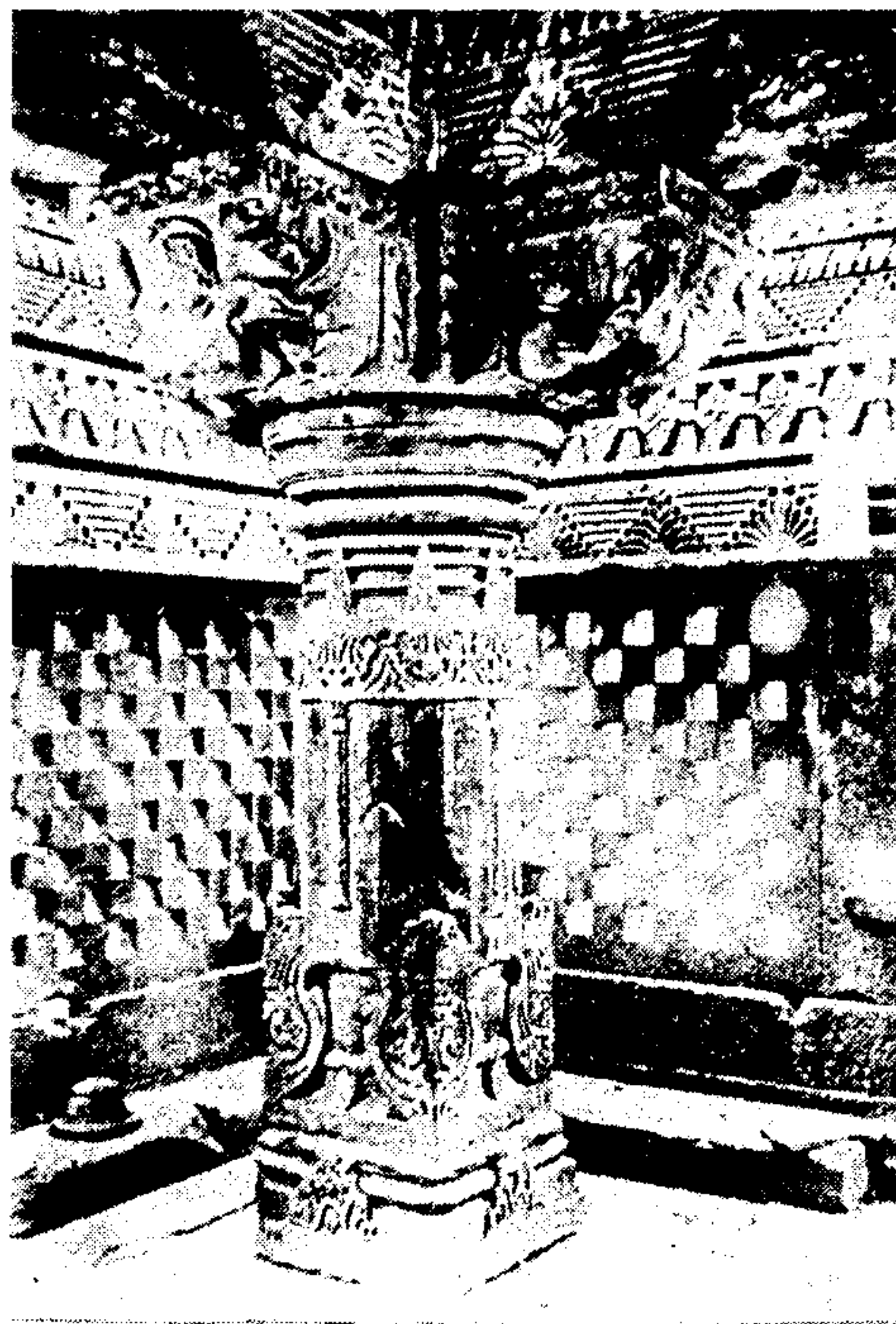


Fig. 13 Typical base of column in an old temple



Fig. 14 Capital of a typical column with foliage, vase and bells



*Fig. 15 Capital of a column from Orissa temple.
Note similarity with Fig. 14 capital*

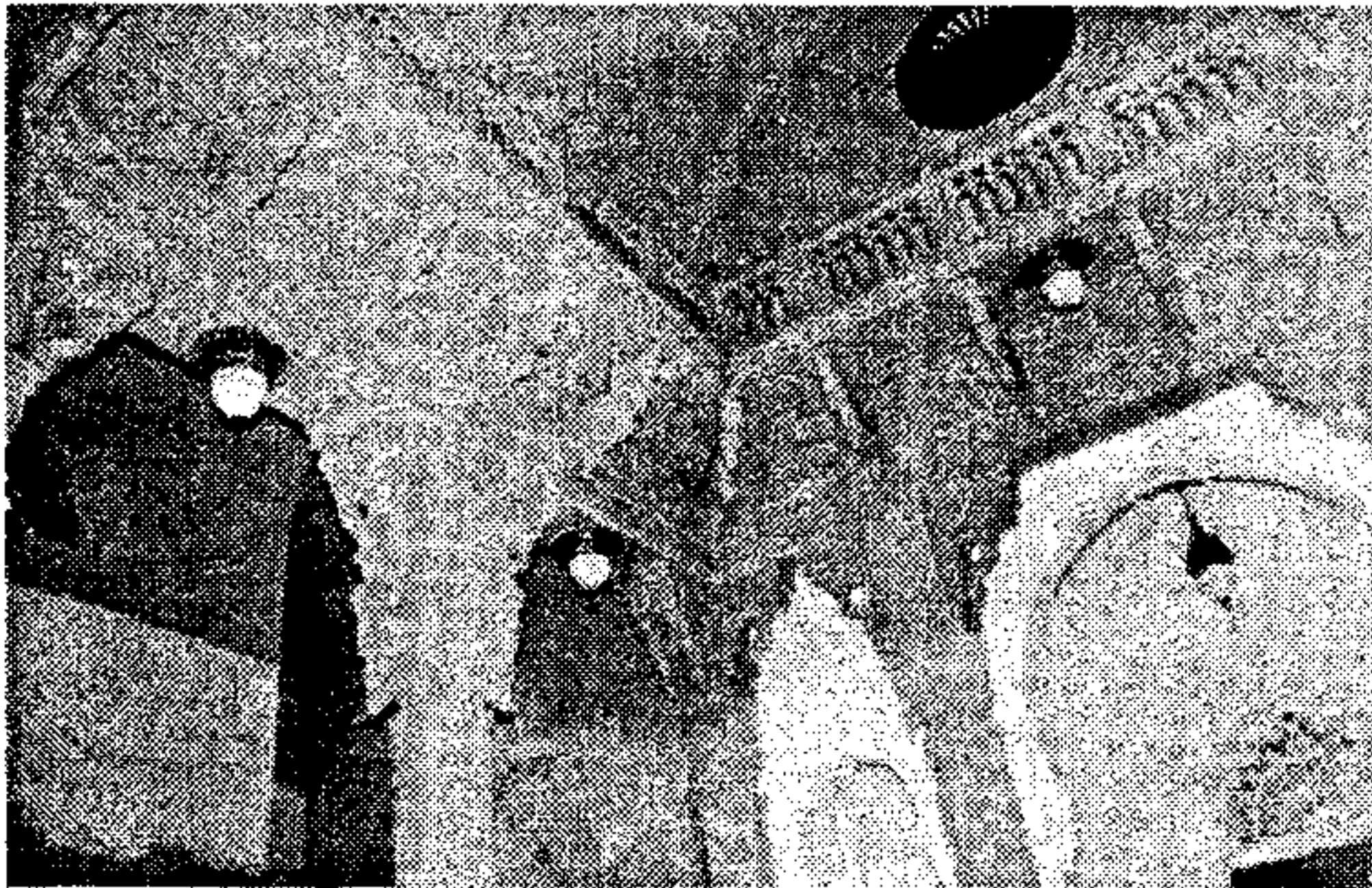


Fig. 16 Brackets and balcony in Ramakrishna Temple

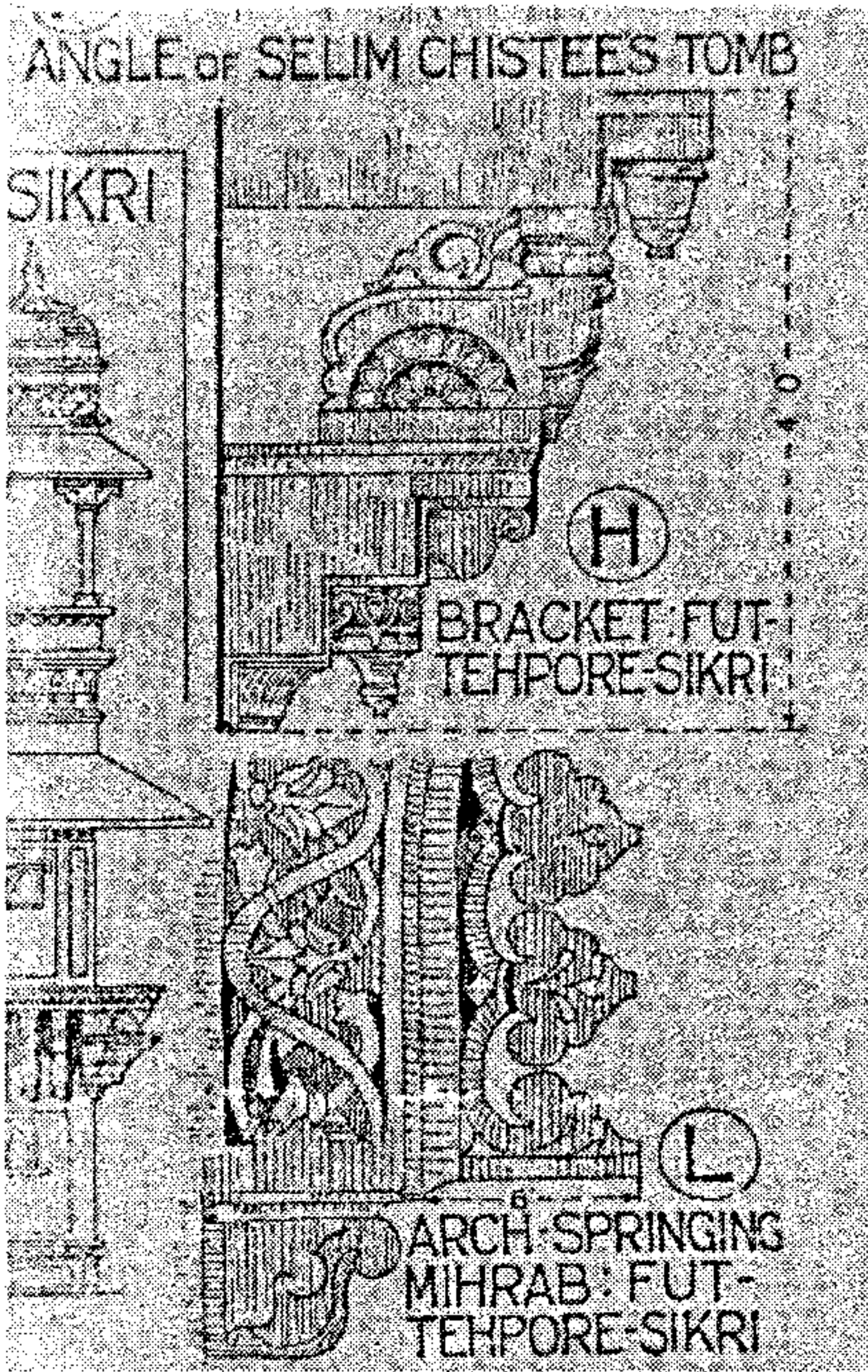


Fig. 17 Brackets at Fatehpur Sikri, U.P. Note the similarity with brackets in Fig. 16

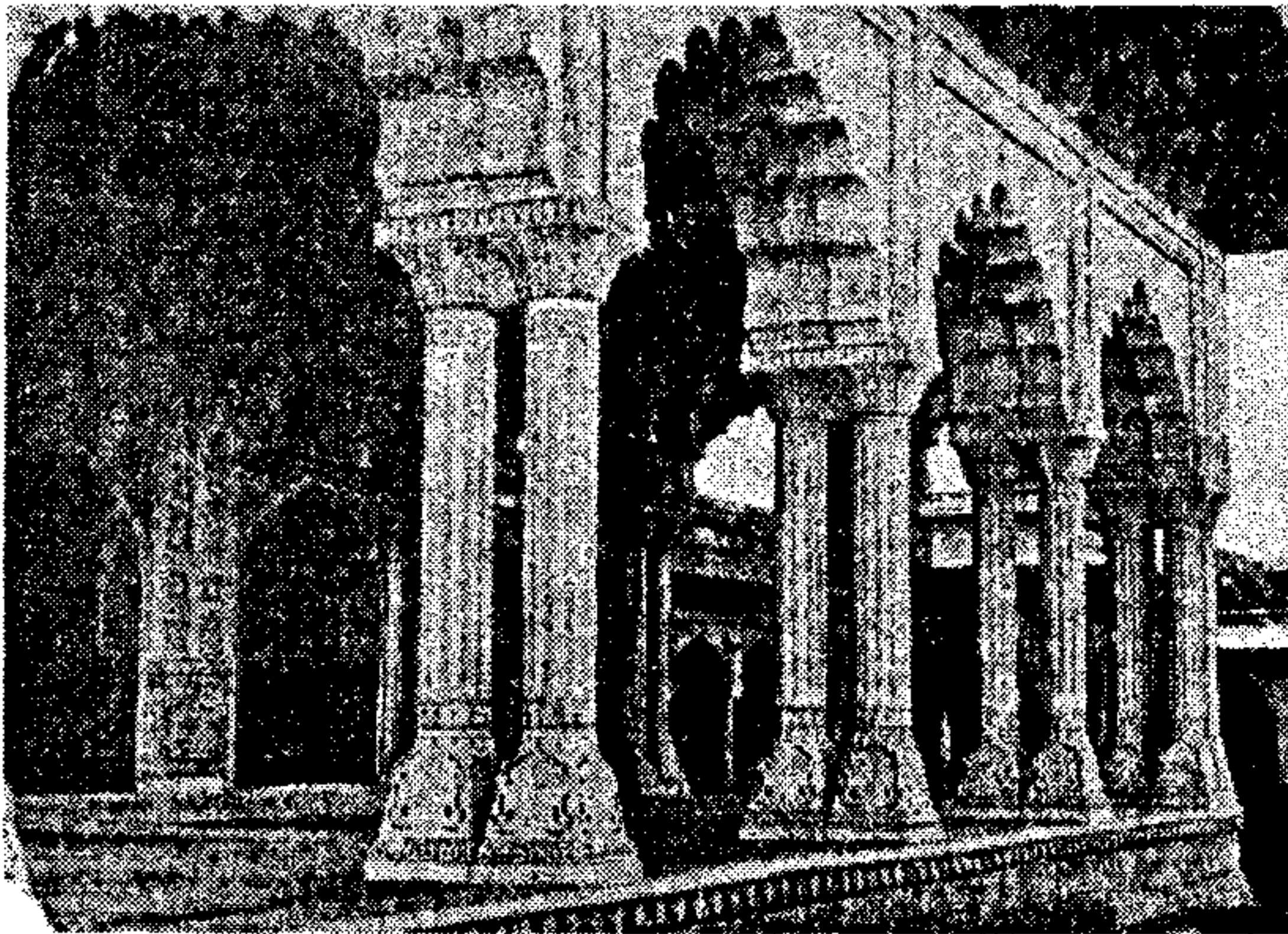


Fig. 18 The Diwan-I-Am, Agra Fort (AD 1628–58). Note the double columns and the arches

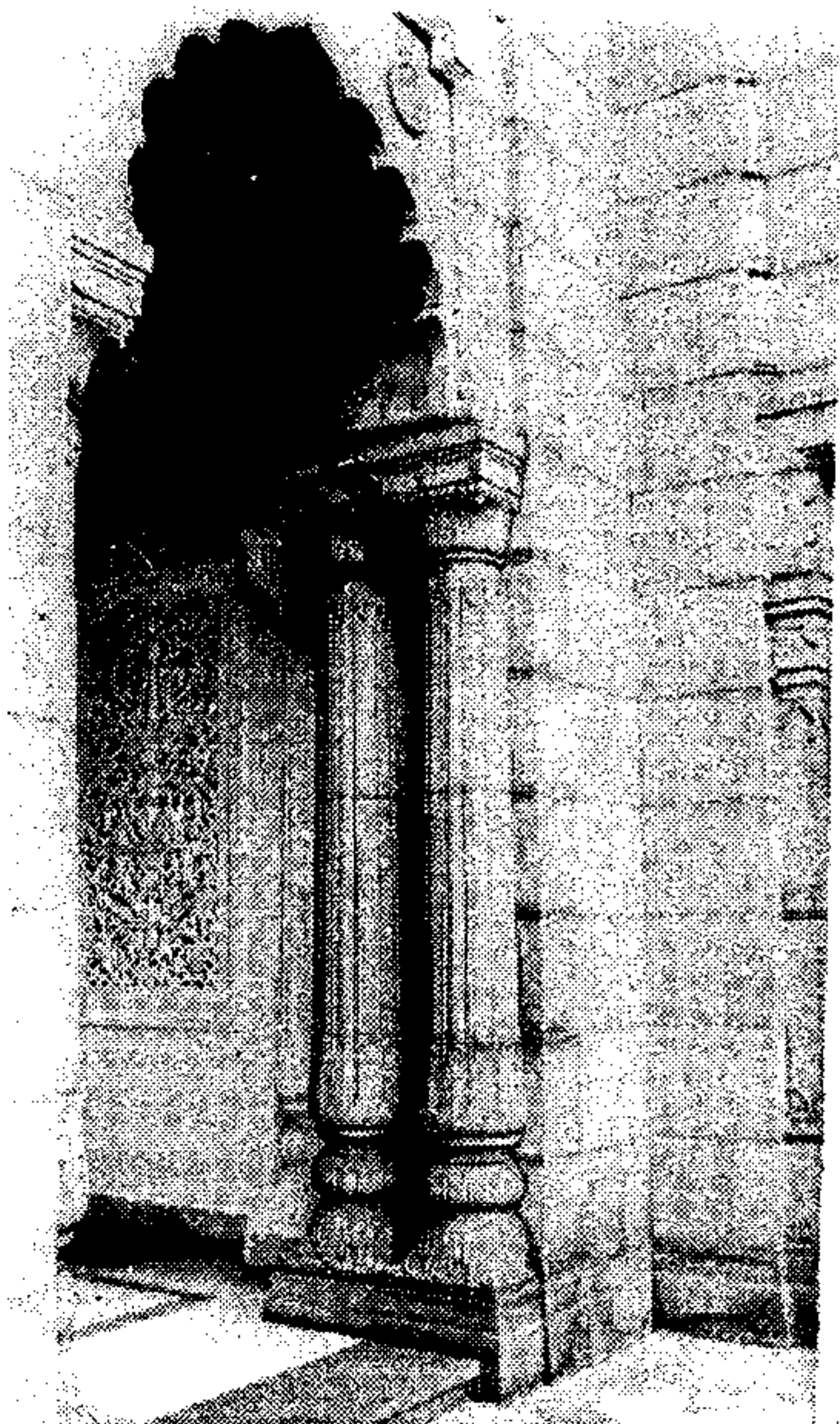


Fig. 19 The arcade at Ramakrishna Temple. Note the similarity with columns and arches in Fig. 18

pattern of palaces of Jodhpur (Fig. 2) and Udaipur though the curvature of *chajjas* are more common in Bengal Temples (Fig. 3).

The three scalloped arches of the central pavilion at top are beautifully balanced with the large main arch below which in turn is complementary to the entrance door with its horse-shoe arch below (Fig. 4). The similarity with entrance composition of the cave temples at Nasik (Fig. 5), Kondane or Ajanta, Maharashtra is obvious.

The horse-shoe arch supported on double pilaster at each end, shows a scroll ending, which is the symbol of scripture used in the Sanchi *stupa* gate (Fig. 6). The monogram of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission in a lattice work fills in the horse-shoe fittingly. Hindu religious symbols like elephants, lotuses and a *Shivalinga* sculptured by Sri Nandalal Bose completes the entrance gate composition. The windows on either side of entrance gate have suggestion of similar pattern in Moghul and Rajput palaces. The squarish projections at extreme ends of facade topped by domes suggest of fortifications used in old Moghul forts. Overall, the entrance facade gives an imposing effect made up in three tiers, springing of arch and pavilions.

The Interior

When one walks in through the entrance, eyesight moves down the row of columns (Fig. 7) to the deity sitting at the end. The tall columns supporting vaulted roof reminds one of the interior of Buddhist Chaitya at Karle (Fig. 8) and Kondane of Western Ghats, Maharashtra. However, the spacing of pillars and their design is far more cheerful unlike the sombre rows of rock-cut chaityas.

The wide nave, narrow aisles, windows alternating with niches and the Garbhamandira attached to the Natmandira in a

continuous space (Fig. 9) reminds one of Christian churches especially in plan (Fig. 10). However, the vaulted roof of the nave of congregational hall more aptly recalls to one's mind the picturesque effect created in the Chaitya at Karle where rows of wooden arches raised from column capitals allowed a play of light and shadow.

The Columns

The long row of single pillars is interrupted by a set of double pillars on both sides of the side entrance, complementing the entrance. The pillars have a tall base (Fig. 12), an octagonal shaft and richly ornamented capital (Fig. 14). The capital reminds one of the Orissa style with foliage in a replica of decorative pot (Fig. 15) and bells hanging down the sides. The beam above is supported by decorative brackets (Fig. 16) which remind one of the brackets in south Indian temples. The projected balcony supported from the beams by brackets with the pillars below are similar to those at palaces of Fatehpur Sikri (Fig. 17).

Garbhamandira

The Garbhamandira or main shrine itself, unlike those in Hindu temples which have little or no light, is very well lighted and ventilated. The Hindu temples had to resort to closed shrines during Muslim invasions and, to create a feeling of humility as well as to provide protection, have a low entrance to it. But the vision of Swamiji of the all-embracing openness in the religion of Sri Ramakrishna foresaw the use of the shrine by millions without restriction. The walls of the shrine inside and outside towards the congregational hall are pure white in contrast to the warm light buff colour of the hall. The arches and lattice work (Fig. 19) remind one of the Mughal Diwan-I-Am at Agra (Fig. 18). The white marble statue of Sri Ramakrishna sculptured by Sri Gopeswar Pal which has variety of moods as per play of light and shade is proportionate to the scale

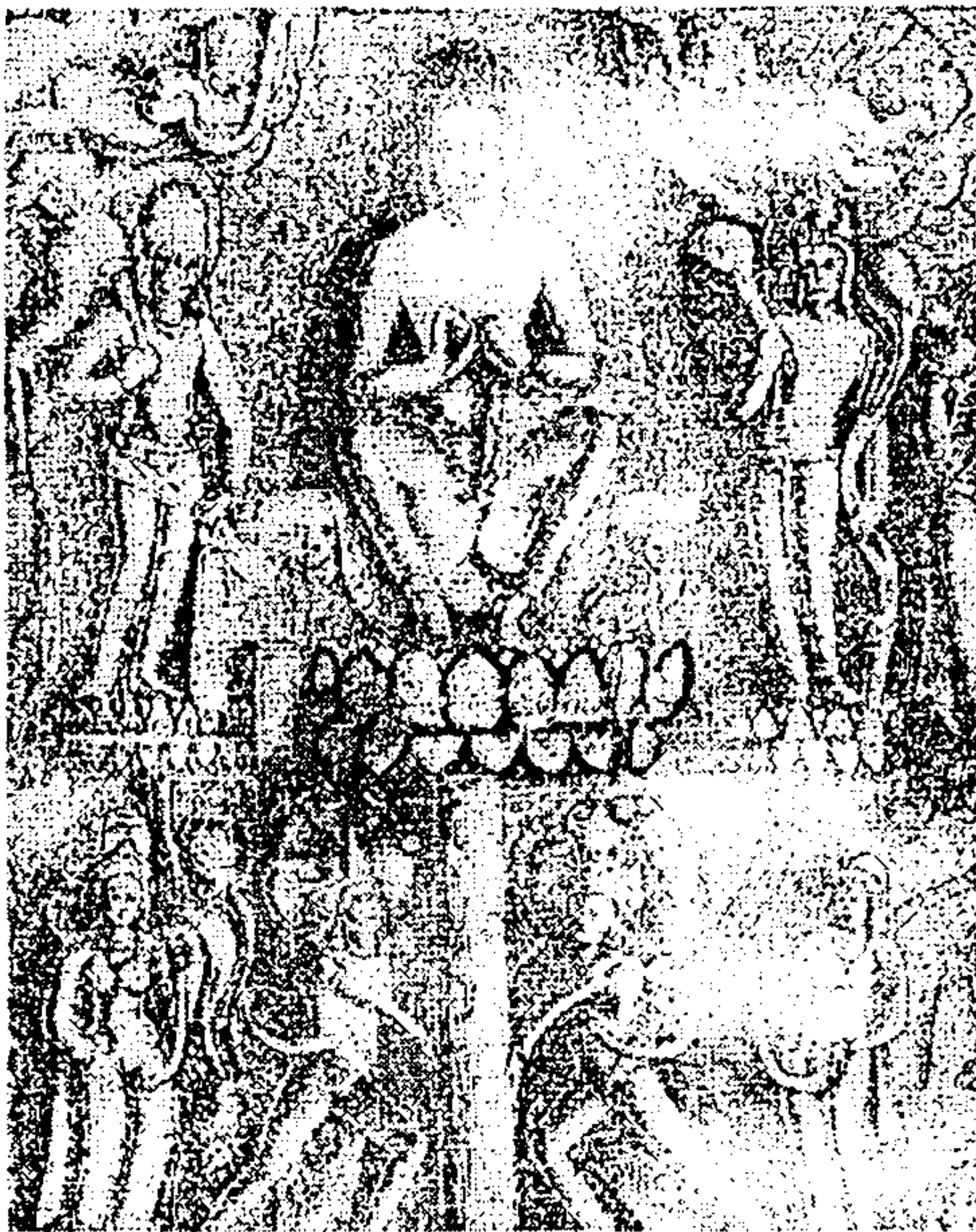


Fig. 21 Buddha seated on lotus, Kanheri

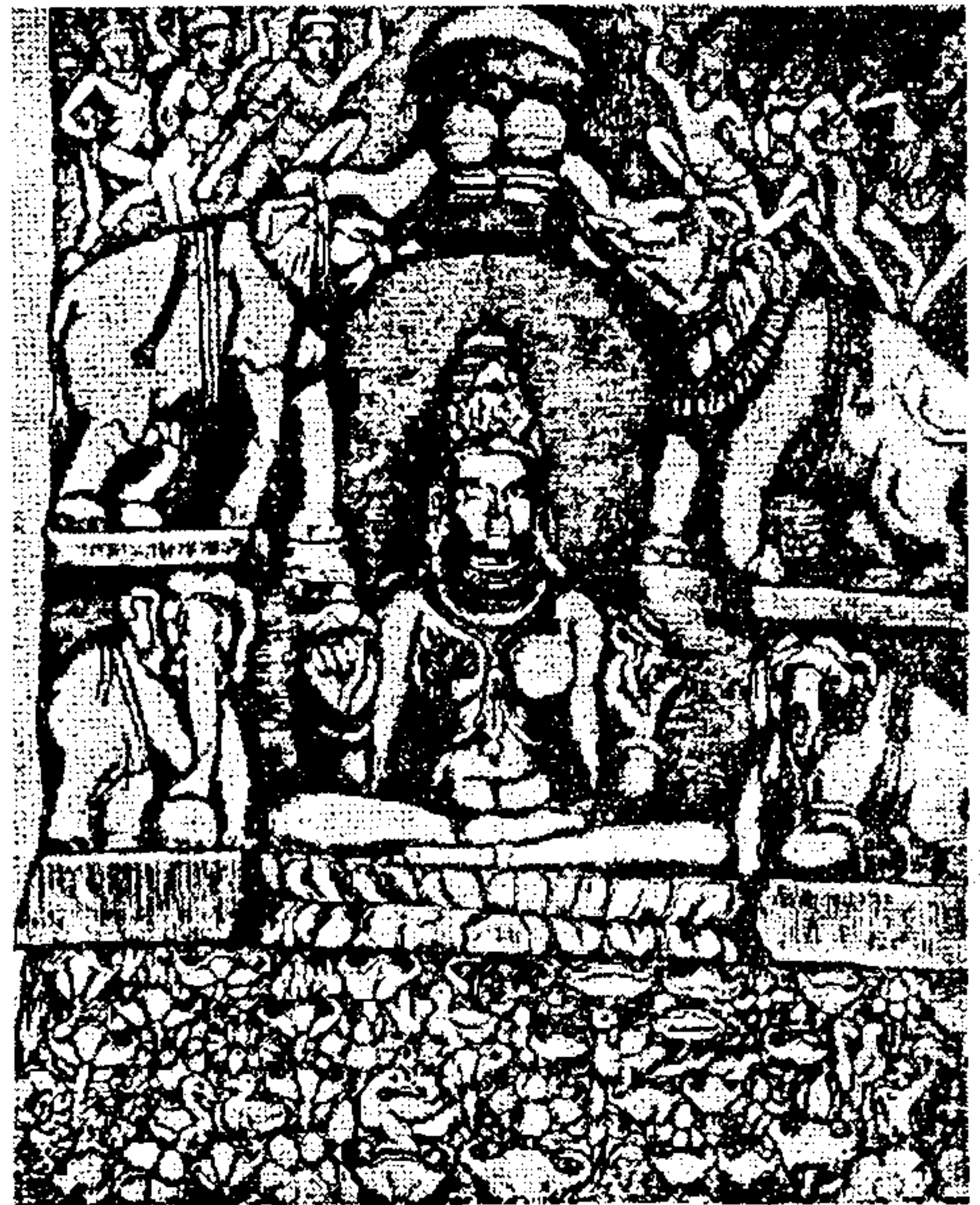
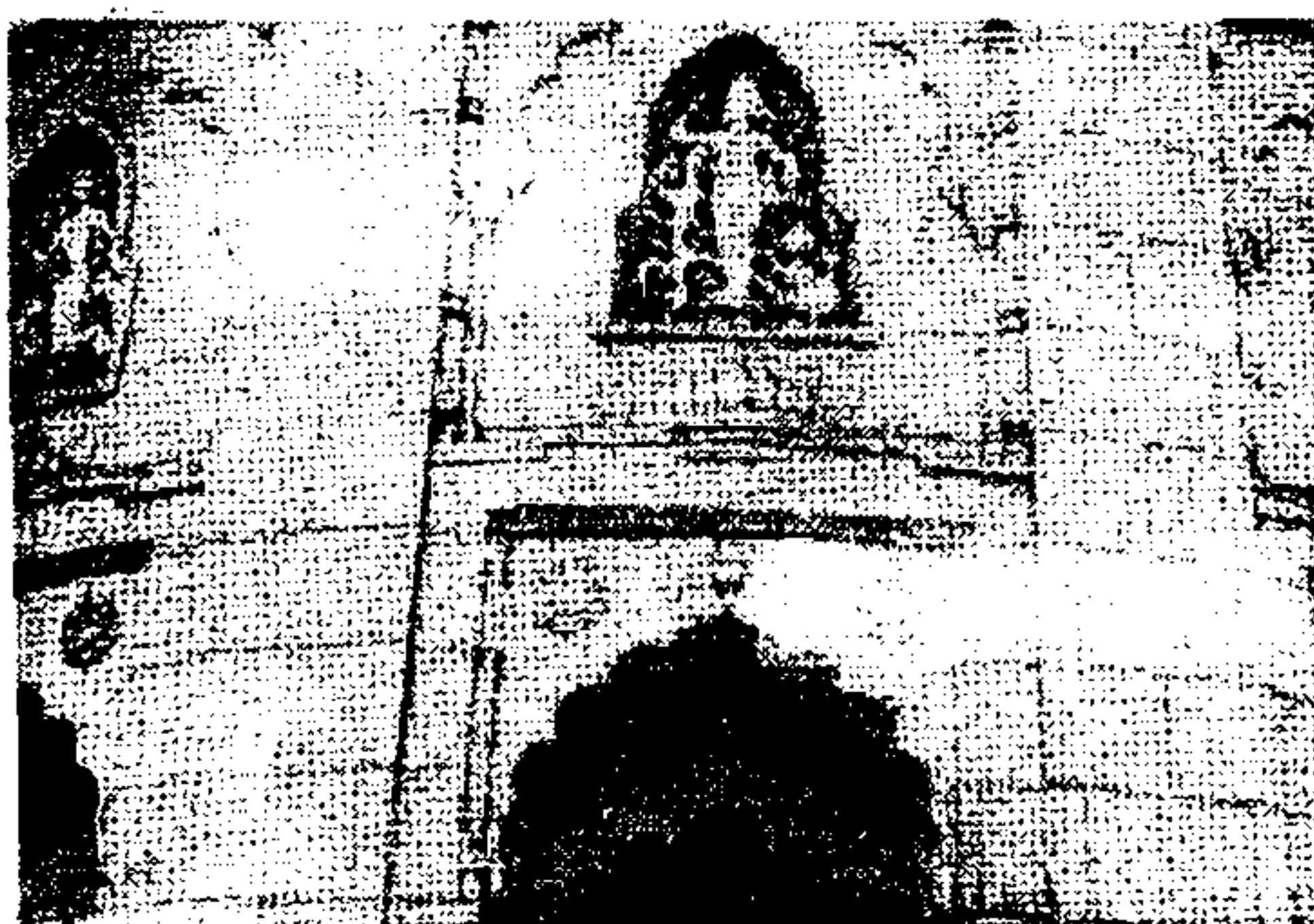


Fig. 22 Lakshmi at Ellora, Kailasa Temple sitting on a lotus



*Fig. 23 Inlaid statues of Navagraha (nine planets) on the circumambulatory path.
Note the similarity with Hindu temples (Fig. 24)*

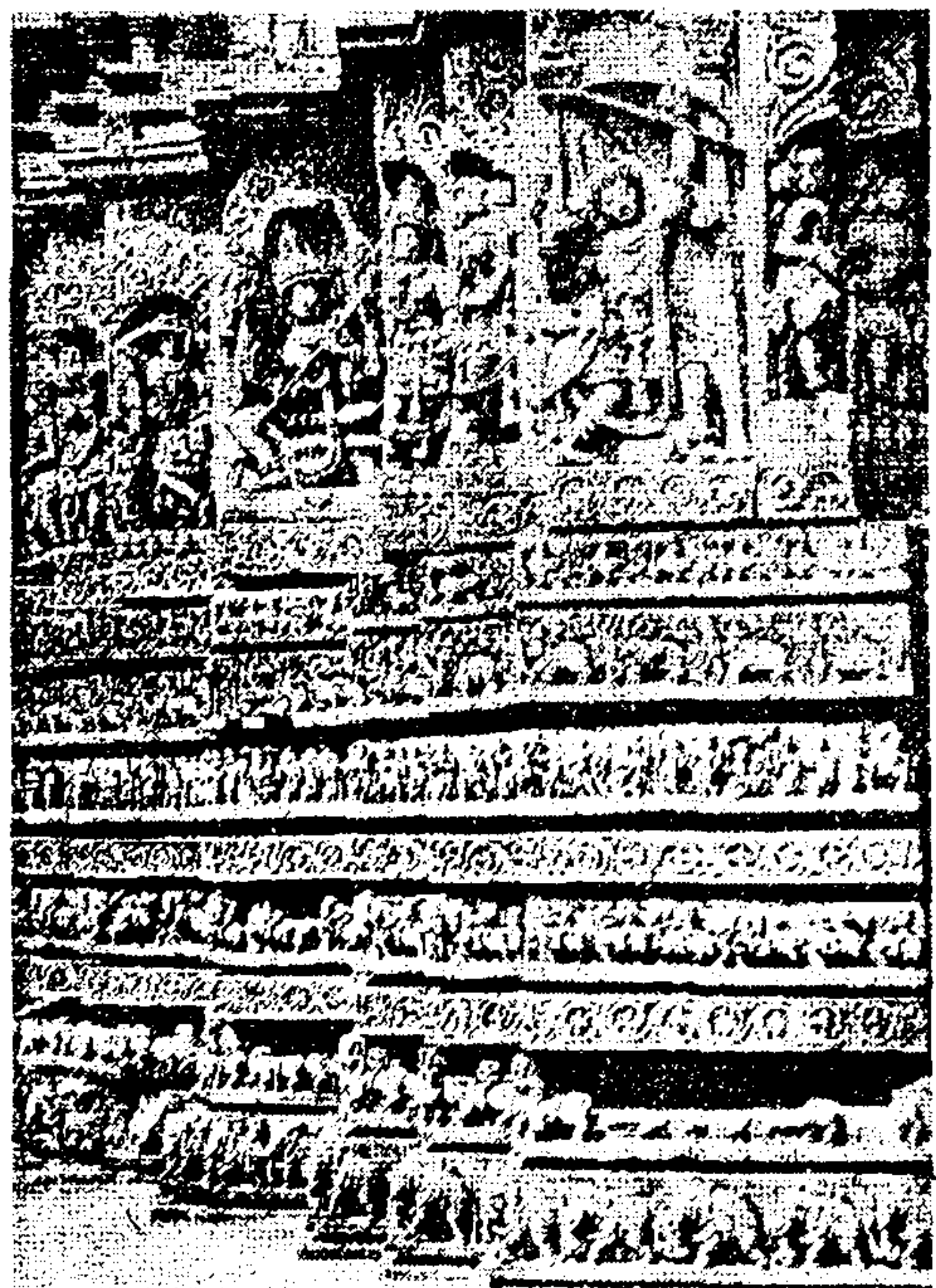


Fig. 24 Statues of deities at Khajuraho temple



Fig. 25 Dome composition of Ramakrishna Temple. Note the height of the central dome and composition with the pavilions and smaller domes and its similarity with the composition in Fig. 27, the difference being relative height of central dome

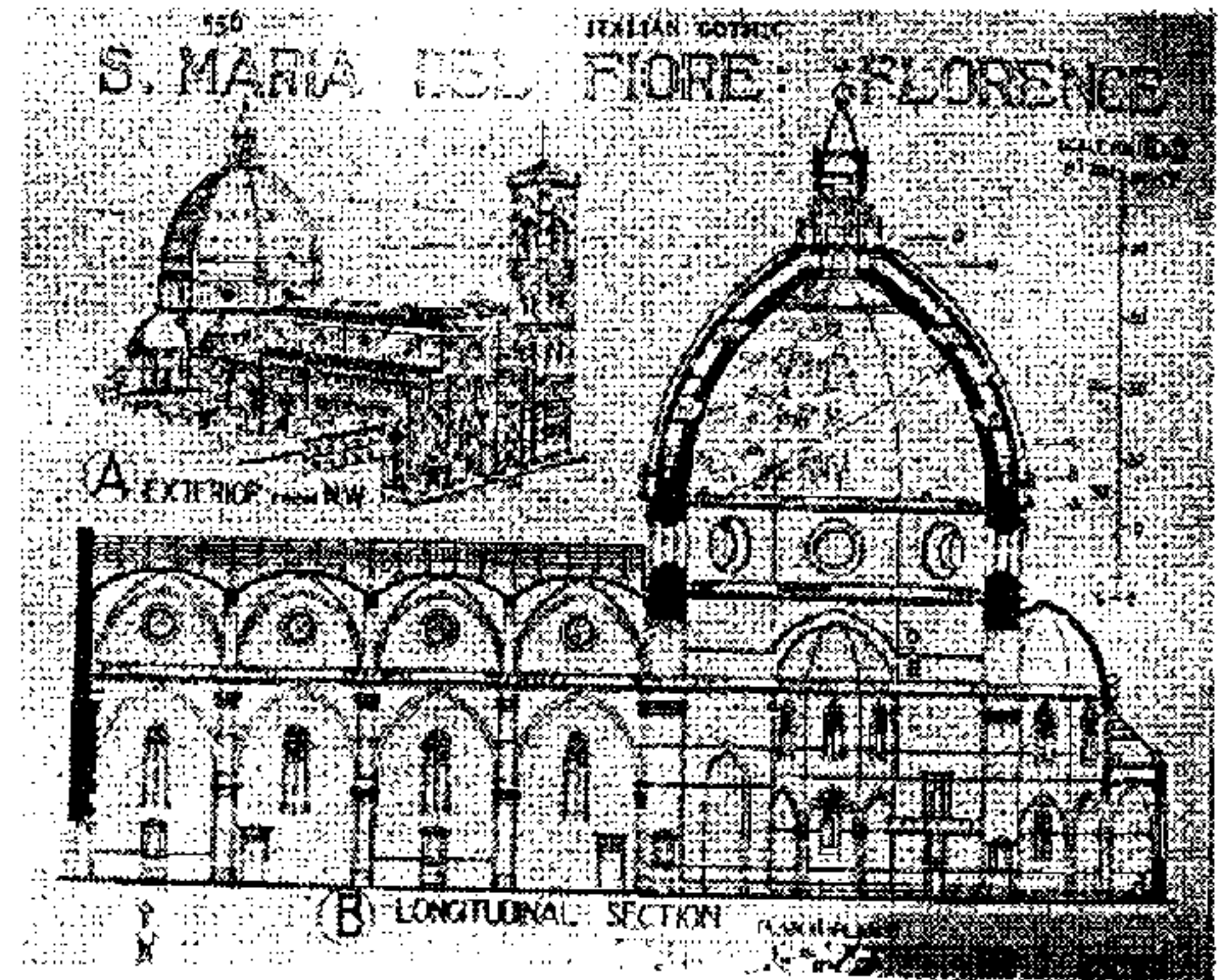


Fig. 26 Dome Maria Del Fiore, Florence: AD 1300. Note the high dome with top lantern



Fig. 27 Tomb of Raja Bakhtawar Singh at Alwar, Rajasthan

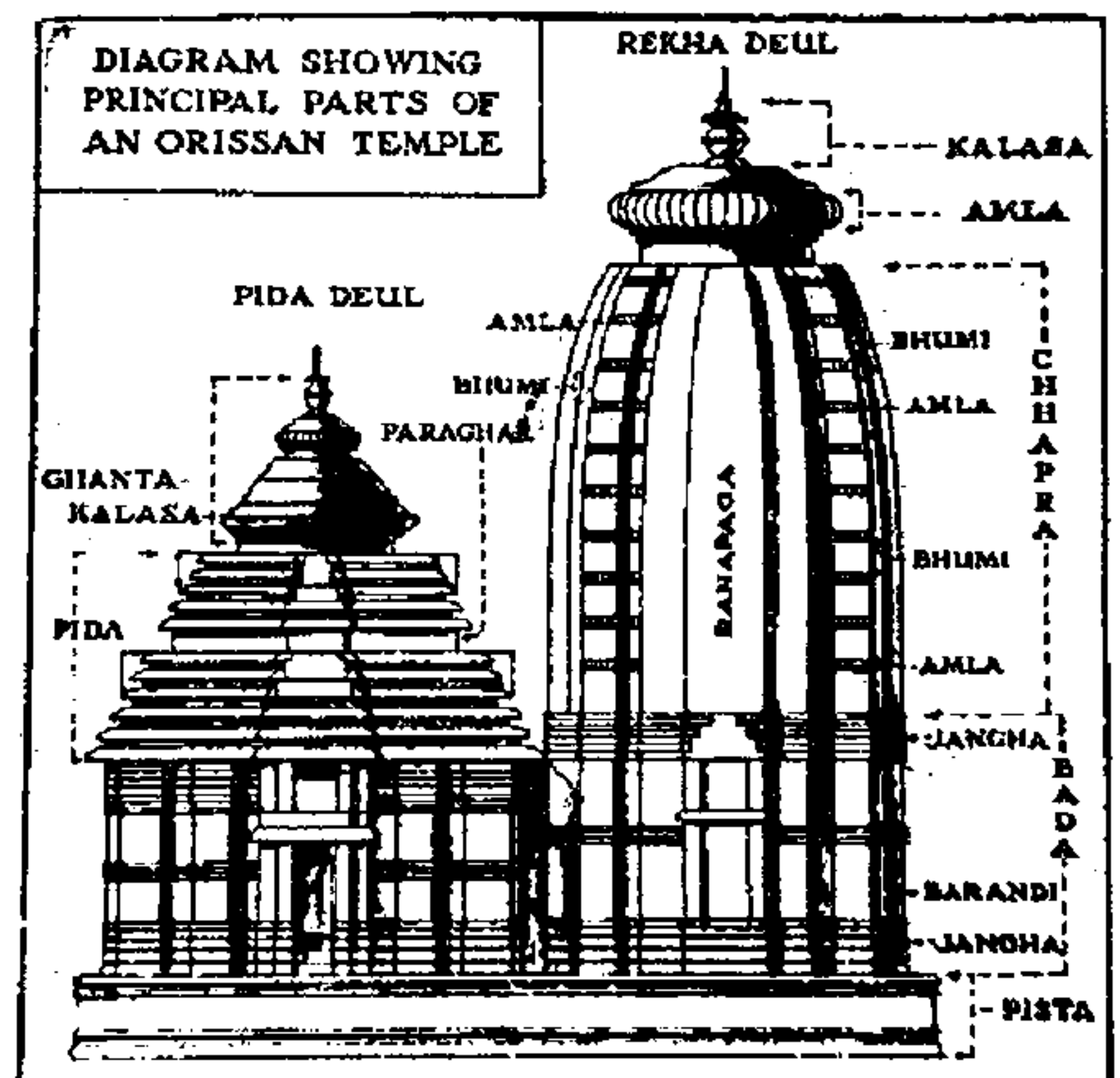


Fig. 28 Orissa Temple. Note the top Shikhara, the Kalasa and the Amla (Amalaka) and its similarity with the top dome at Ramakrishna Temple



*Fig. 29 Side entrance gate at Ramakrishna Temple.
Note similarity with side column and central doorway as in Fig. 30*

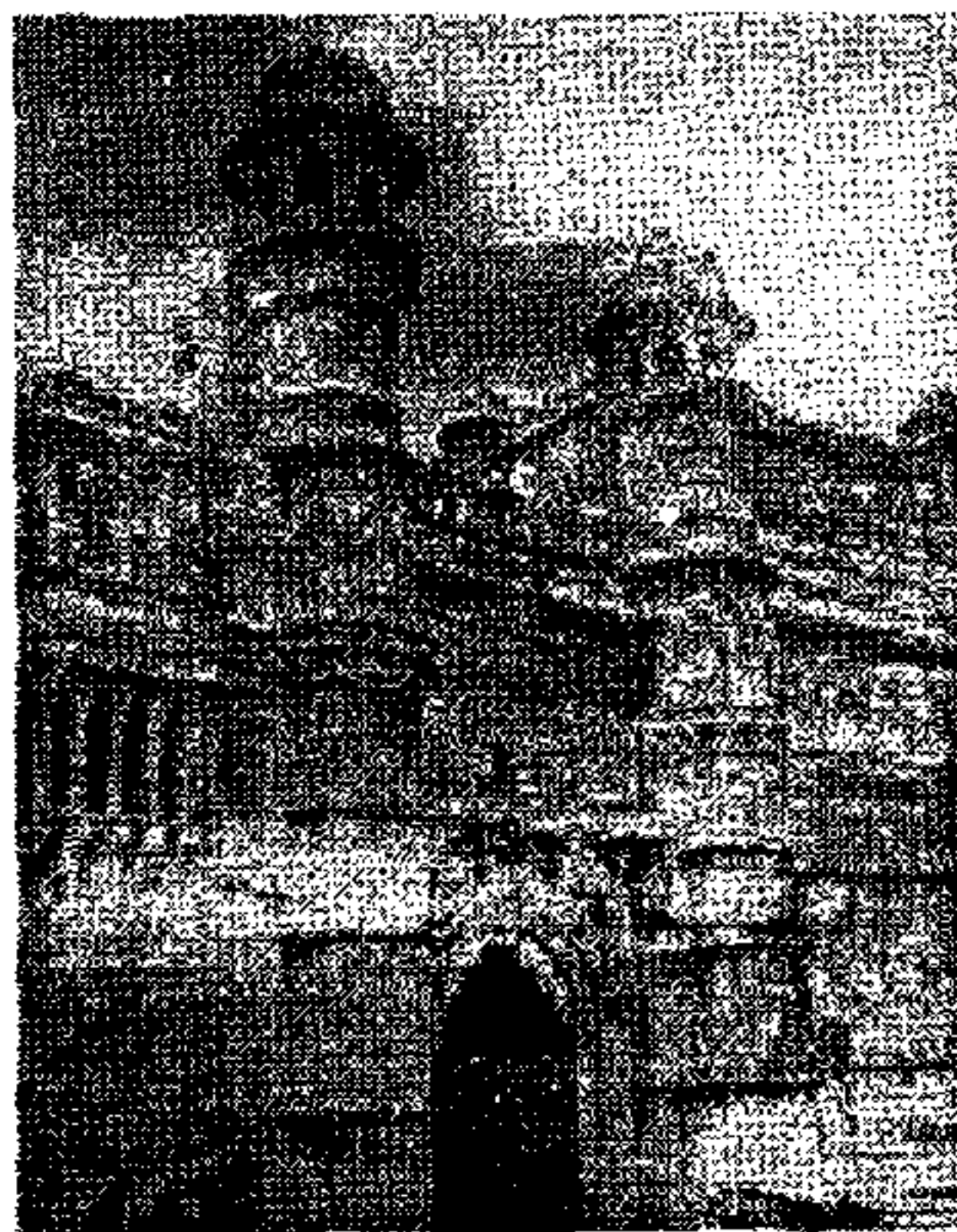
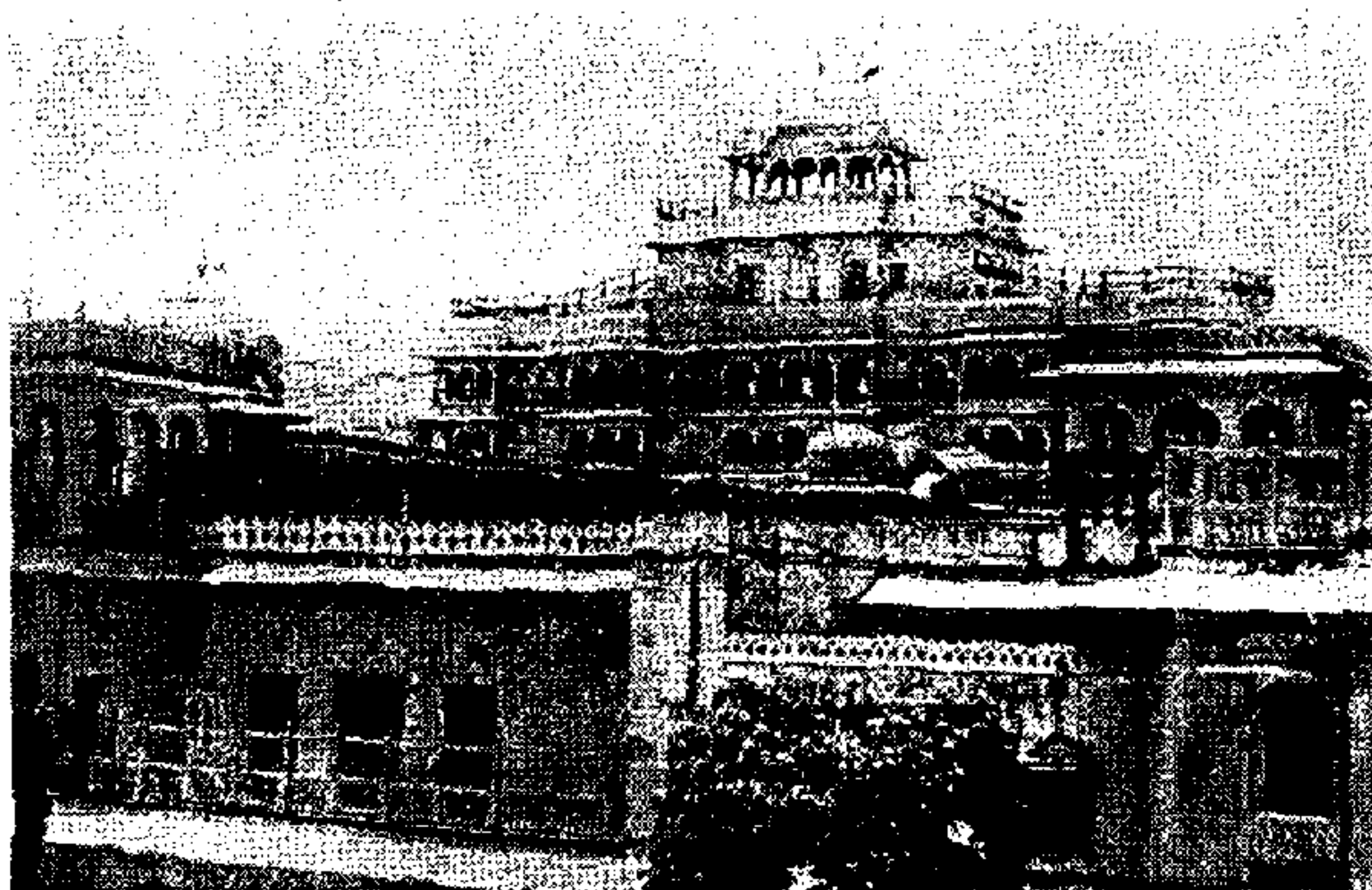
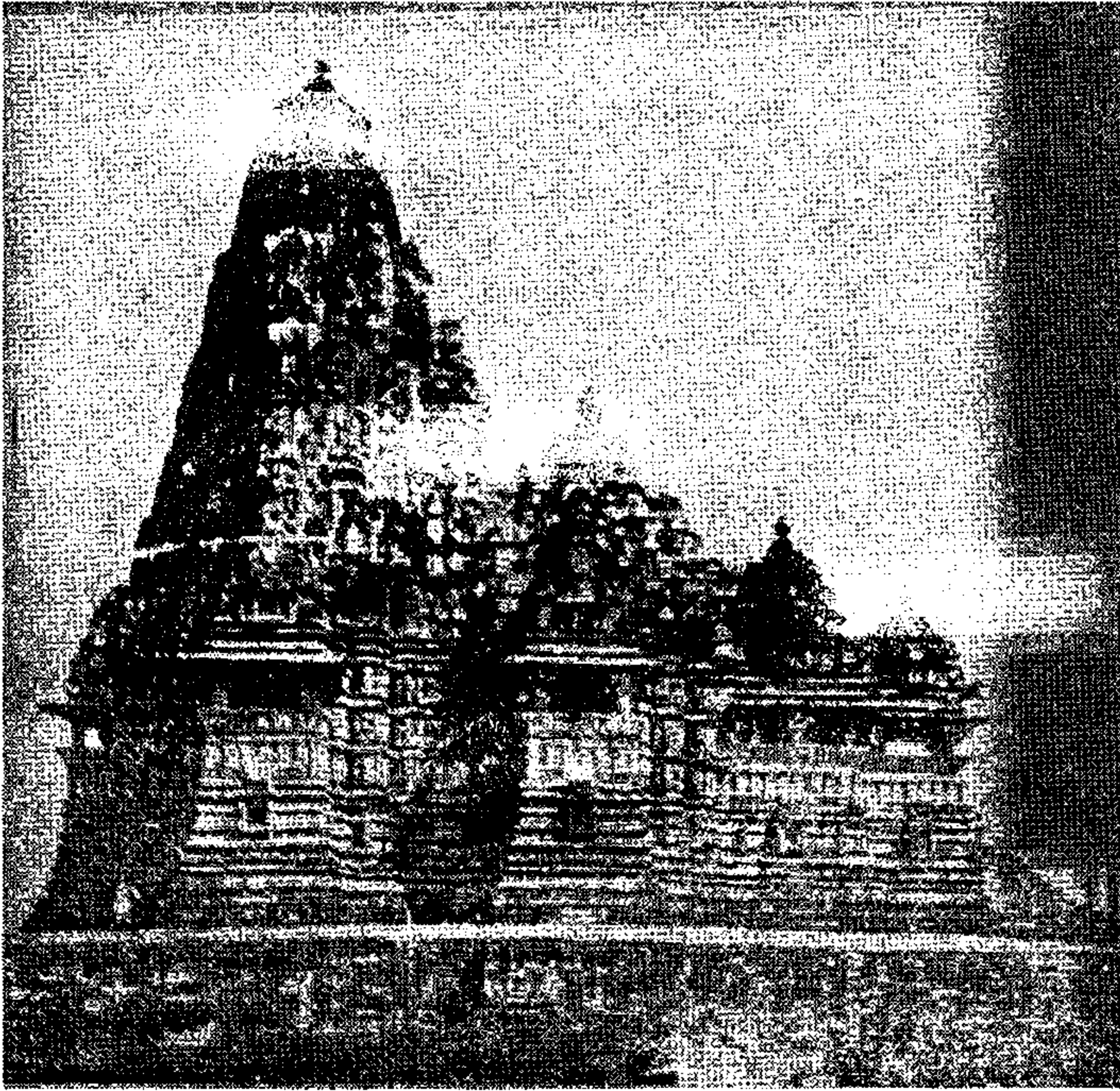


Fig. 30 Elephant Gateway to Man Mandira, Gwalior Fort



*Fig. 31 City Palace, Jodhpur, Rajasthan.
Note similarity of the parapet wall in Ramakrishna Temple (Fig. 29)*



*Fig. 32 Khajuraho (M.P.) Temple of Khanderaya Mahadeo, AD 1000.
Note the high platform pedestal on which the temple sits*



Fig. 33 Ramakrishna Temple with the river Ganges in the background

of the temple and is placed on a beautifully carved fully blossomed lotus (Fig. 20) set on a moderately decorated drum (*damaru*) shaped marble platform designed by Sri Nandalal Bose. The idea finds its echo in the statue of Buddha at Kanheri (Fig. 21) or that of Lakshmi at Ellora (Fig. 22). The origin of Lotus Seat (*padmasana*) of deity is in yogic meditations.

The congregational hall (Natmandira) and the shrine (garbhamandira) is connected by a neck, a shortened form of Jagmohana of the Orissa temples with two side entrances and a space meant for the party singing devotional songs.

Circumambulation

After having *darshan* (view) of the deity, one passes through the side doors of this Jagmohana on a circumambulatory path (*pradakshina*) around the shrine which reminds one of that at St. Peter's or Chaitya halls. The pradakshina is highlighted by the lattice work statues of nine planets (Shani, Rahu, Ketu, etc.) (Fig. 23) carved by Sri Nandalal Bose and reminds one of such statues at the Hindu temples (Fig. 24).

Roof on the Shrine

The circumambulatory path along with the shrine is surmounted by a beautiful pyramidal composition of domes and pavilions. The central dome on top of the main shrine is similar to the dome at S. Maria Del Fiore, Florence (Fig. 26). Surrounded by curvilinear pavilions along with eight domes, it creates a similar effect, though more heightened (Fig. 25) than in the tomb at Alwar (Fig. 27). The curves of pavilions are more in the line of the Bengal temple roofs.

The central dome with its imposing appearance, ribbed perimeter topped with in-

verted lotus below a ribbed round stone called *Amalaka* crowning the spire is similar to that found in temples of Bhubaneswar (Fig. 28). The smaller domes are proportionate replicas of the central dome, and total twelve in number.

Side Entrance

While going around the temple platform one is attracted by the exterior of side entrances to the congregational hall. The entrance gate with two pilasters, pyramidal cantilever and two side columns (Fig. 29) resemble Elephant gateway of Man Mandira at Gwalior Fort (Fig. 30). The details of the column bear similarities with the city palace of Chittor, Rajasthan.

A statue of Sri Ganesha and Sri Mahavir Hanuman adorn the top of east and west gateways respectively as protector deities.

The Monument

At the time of leaving the monument, one is impressed by the architectural variety of forms, styles, elements and details used in this temple harmoniously blended with each other and at the same time casting individual impact. The temple in totality seems to convey a feeling of entering a fort of divine assurance (palace of spirituality) delicately paying tribute to the genius of Sri Ramakrishna whose living presence is enhanced by the architectural motives associated with the culture developed around Bhagavan Buddha, Jesus Christ, Sri Vishnu and other great prophets and saints of the earth. Raising the temple on a 1.75 metre high platform (with a basement below) has enhanced its significance (God has to be reached with some effort) and its visibility to the individual visitor as in Khanderaya temple. □

Formulation, Foundation and Evolution of the Ramakrishna Mission and the Contribution of the Monastic Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna

DR. SASANKA BHUSAN BANDYOPADHYAY

Dr. Sasanka Bhusan Bandyopadhyay in this well-thought-out article traces the many events in the life of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and the direct disciples which point out that there was an inherent purpose behind the formulation and foundation of the Ramakrishna Mission. Tracing the evolution of the Mission and the role of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna in nourishing the Math and the Mission, the author concludes by saying that 'Even from before the Mission was started, each of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna dedicated his life in playing his part in the Great Universal Plan for the good of the entire human society—some laying more stress on the realization of the Atman within through 'internal' discipline, and others on the realization of Atman within all beings through the performance of selfless work amongst people in the 'external' world. Possessed of great spiritual insight and realization, each of them was a spiritual dynamo and gave solace and direction for spiritual growth to many weary souls.'

A hundred years have passed since the Ramakrishna Mission was established. A centenary is a fitting occasion for the recapitulation of the momentous deeds done during both the initial stages and the years that followed, and an occasion as well to re-dedicate ourselves to the fulfilment of the cause for which God incarnated Himself in Sri Ramakrishna.

The Inherent Purpose

God's mission on earth and the resulting sequence of events right from the incarnation's descent are beyond human comprehension unless He favours us by revealing some clues which may form the basis of a faint understanding of the phenomenon. When we analyse the life of Sri Ramakrishna, we come across many such clues, some of which are listed below:

(a) At Gaya, Kshudiram (the father of Sri

Ramakrishna) had a vision in which the god-head, Gadadhar, was insisting on His being born as his son in spite of the latter's imploring to be excused.

(b) The boy Ramakrishna discarded money-making education and insisted on such education as would make him a real man.

(c) During *sadhana* (spiritual practice), he confirmed the equivalence of money and mud as far as spiritual progress is concerned and threw them both into the river Ganges after handling them for some time.

(d) Out of love for sincerity, he agreed to the request of Dhani, the low-caste midwife helper during his birth, for giving alms to him at his sacred thread ceremony, and out of love for truth, he did not deviate from his promise in spite of opposition from elders. He rather held (later in life) that caste-system was not

applicable to the devotees of God.

- (e) He even cleansed a latrine for the effacement of ego, the greatest obstacle on the spiritual path.
- (f) He achieved purity of mind, and through different spiritual paths realized the same God declaring therefore that quarrels for the supremacy of one path over the rest is unwarranted.
- (g) In a vision he saw seven saints in the abode of *Akhandā* (the undivided state), one of whom was recognized by him later to be the precursor of Narendra.
- (h) He dissuaded Narendra from being absorbed in *Nirvikalpa Samādhi* and instead urged him to take the leadership in the task of alleviating the plight of the distressed people.
- (i) Though the fragrance of his spirituality and inspiring talks at Dakshineswar and during his pilgrimages attracted many aspirants, he used to give clarion calls from the roof-top to the young aspirants who, being uncontaminated, were fit recipients of his message. They assembled around him and were adequately instructed.
- (j) For the famished people he arranged food, and said that no spiritual ministration is possible to one oppressed by hunger.
- (k) He looked upon all women as the Divine Mother. Both before and after his *mahasamadhi* he advised his divine consort, Sri Sarada Devi, not to give up her body but to continue the work of spiritual ministration.
- (l) On his attaining *mahasamadhi*, the all-renouncing disciples were brought together at Baranagore through the agency of Surendranath Mitra, whom he (Sri Ramakrishna) advised in a vision.
- (m) Through visions again, Narendra was urged to see India and cross the ocean to spread the message of the Master in the West.

A silent meditation on such clues reveals a

divine all-comprehensive inherent purpose behind the advent of Sri Ramakrishna.

For the prosperity of human society, one needs to have both material and spiritual well-being in a balanced proportion. In the past, the Aryan culture and the *Sanatana Dharma* with its comprehensive spirituality served as the path-finder for peoples of all countries. But, with the passage of time, society became denuded of men and women of renunciation, strength, intellect and firm faith in the all-pervading Almighty God, the Protector of Culture and Dharma. As a result, the Aryan heritage broke up into a number of cultures and religions. Some people seeking sense pleasures and egoistic fulfilment, encouraged greed for wealth and power. Some others resorted to bigotry owing to differences in religious beliefs. Both these tendencies led to envy and dispute and even to bloodshed and various other troubles. Such a state of affairs necessitated the advent of a spiritual saviour; and He was Sri Ramakrishna, representing in himself the true divine nature of men and women, demonstrating in his own life a living example of the *Sanatana Dharma*, and showing men and women of all times and of all countries how the Eternal Lord of creation, preservation and destruction reveals Himself out of His mercy in the heart of a seer for the purpose of resurrecting, re-instating and re-propagating the *Sanatana Dharma* for the good of the entire humanity in a manner that is most suitable for the present age. For removing the defects which had crept into various strata of society, Sri Ramakrishna carried out from the beginning of his life various convincing spiritual experiments (*sadhanas*) and arrived at conclusions some of which are indicated in the above listed clues. The inherent purpose of the Ramakrishna Mission would, therefore, appear to be to propagate widely these events in the life of Sri Ramakrishna, laying particular stress on (a) the need for controlling the self, greed and ego, (b) the need for gaining a firm convic-

tion in the omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient God and for leading a life of confidence and dedication unto Him, (c) the need to uphold castelessness of devotees, and (d) the need to realize the oneness of God worshipped in different world religions. The previous degradation took society to such abysmal depths that common people, by and large, lost even the sustaining power of the body (the *Annamayakosha*), without which the propagated spiritual knowledge and culture cannot be comprehended. So, the initial body-care in the form of food, clothing, etc. as indicated in Sri Ramakrishna's actions and utterances, like 'Dharma cannot be comprehended on an empty stomach' and 'Serve Jiva (living beings) as Shiva (God)', has to be incorporated in the scheme as well.

To translate the inherent purpose into practice, Sri Ramakrishna brought together suitable potential stalwarts, moulded them, and proclaimed Narendra's leadership in many ways. Narendra was especially instructed and empowered for fulfilling this mission. Even after giving up his earthly body, Sri Ramakrishna appeared in visions to particular devotees and brought his team under a single roof at Baranagore; to Narendra he gave indications to take up an itinerary as a wandering monk to come in contact with the Indian people and feel the pulse of the land, and to go abroad to preach the cardinal principles of the *Sanatana Dharma*. Indication of a Central Organization was also given when Sri Ramakrishna assured Narendra that he would remain at any place to which Narendra would carry him on his shoulders. Narendra literally followed this indication by carrying Sri Ramakrishna's relics on his own shoulders, placing it at the present site of the Belur Math and worshipping it.

The inherent purpose of the grand scheme of Sri Ramakrishna's advent in-

cluded women also, whose Motherhood he valued most. He worshipped God in the form of Mother Kali, and Kali in the form of his wife, Sri Sarada Devi. All women were to him the embodiment of the Divine Mother. After his *mahasamadhi* he appeared in a vision to Sri Sarada Devi and instructed her to spread the message of spirituality to the future generation, particularly to women devotees. Therein was an indication of a future organization for women centering her and an indication also of her role as the mother of the organization for men.

The Foundation of the Ramakrishna Mission

Having gained a complete and clear picture of the Divine Project through the instructions of his Master and His visions, a knowledge of the practicability of the Master's ideas received from contacts with a vast range of peoples during his eastern and western wanderings, as well as a futuristic vision obtained from an analytical study of the past world history, Swami Vivekananda was fully convinced that in the coming resurrection the underlying eternal perfection in man will be revealed in human society in a much clearer and better way and the rejuvenated society will surpass all previous ones in its strength and purity of character. Swamiji, therefore, drew the attention of all men, both Sannyasins and householders, assembled at Balaram Basu's residence on 1 May 1897, towards the future work, as it was revealed to him, and urged them to work together in translating the ideas into a practical reality by forming an association; this was unanimously agreed to, and in the first meeting of the inaugurated association held on 5 May 1897, the following aims and objects (abridged) were adopted:

1. The Association shall be known as the Ramakrishna Mission.
2. The Aim shall be to propagate the truths preached by Sri Ramakrishna and

demonstrated by practical application in his own life, and to help others to put these truths into practice in their lives, for their temporal, mental and spiritual advancement.

3. The duty of the Mission shall be to conduct, in the right spirit, the activities of the movement inaugurated by Sri Ramakrishna for the establishment of fellowship among the followers of different religions, knowing them all to be so many forms only of the one undying Eternal Religion (*Sanatana Dharma*).

4. Its Method shall be: (a) To train men so as to make them competent to teach such knowledge or Science as are conducive to the material and spiritual welfare of the masses, (b) To encourage earning livelihood by arts and industries and provide for the same, (c) To introduce and spread among the people Vedantic and other religious ideas in the way they were elucidated in the life of Sri Ramakrishna, (d) To establish Ashramas in different parts of India as well as in foreign countries for carrying out the above work, and to maintain closer relationship and better understanding amongst them.

A resolution was also passed forming a committee with Swami Vivekananda as the General President, Swamis Brahmananda and Yogananda as the President and the Vice-President, respectively, of the Calcutta Centre, Mr. Narendra Nath Mitra as the Secretary, and Dr. Sashi Bhusan Ghosh and Sarat Chandra Sarkar as Under-secretaries, and Sarat Chandra Chakraborty as the Reader of Scriptures.

After about three years, the Ramakrishna Mission Association practically ceased to function as an independent organization, the Ramakrishna Math authorities themselves having taken up the work originally undertaken by the Mission Association. However, in 1909 the Mission was reconstituted with some changes and registered under the Societies' Registration Act XXI of 1860 and the same is still continuing,

with the original motto: *Ātmano mokṣārtham jagaddhitāya ca*, adopting a positive attitude: 'Work is Worship'—'Work (for Jiva) is Worship (of God)', so that the self or the ego does not trespass between the worker and the beneficiary.

The Evolution of the Ramakrishna Mission

The Inauguration of the Mission was no doubt helpful, but the inspiring words of Swami Vivekananda were more effective in motivating people to work for the good of others. This led to (1) the famine relief work in Murshidabad District conducted by Swami Akhandananda from 15 May 1897, (2) the plague relief work in Calcutta by Sister Nivedita in April 1898, (3) the distress relief work at Varanasi for the poor and the helpless started in 1900 by Charu Chandra and Kedarnath Maulik (later Swami Achalananda), and (4) the service to sick monks at Hardwar commenced by Swamis Kalyanananda and Nischayananda in 1901. Items 1, 3 and 4 later took the shape of permanent Ashramas and are functioning to this day. The plague relief work, which broke the hesitation and superstition in the minds of the people of Calcutta to serve others, had a lasting effect.

These were a few of the services which started during Swamiji's time. Thereafter the work continued with full zeal, but slowly and cautiously, depending on the requirement, the availability of competent personnel and the political weather of the country, before as well as after the Independence.

Broadly, the fields of work have been:

1. *Relief and Rehabilitation work* during calamities like flood, famine, draught, earthquake, fire, riots, etc.
2. *Educational Work for boys* without distinction of caste or religion, in different grades of schools, colleges, polytechnics, and various non-formal educa-

tional centres.

3. *Medical Services* in charitable/mobile dispensaries, clinics, hospitals of different types, regular camps, etc.

4. *Work in Rural and Tribal areas:* General, medical, agricultural, educational and training for imparting self-reliance.

5. *Work for Women* through girls' schools, nurses training centres, old age homes, etc.

6. *Spiritual and Cultural Work* through dissemination of spiritual and cultural ideas through classes, lectures, seminars, festivals, publication of books, journals, magazines, souvenirs, etc.

7. *Activities amongst the youth* through sports, recreation, cultural activities and spiritual discussion.

As on 31 March 1997, the total number of Math and Mission Centres in India and abroad are 101 and 34 respectively. Creditable, indeed, is the work done in these centres, yet when the plight of general people and the defects and deficiencies in people at the helm of affairs in the country as discussed at the parliament are considered, one may be inclined to feel that the impact of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings has yet to produce the desired momentum in the minds of a vast section of people.

Contribution of the

Disciples of Sri Ramakrishna

Swami Vivekananda's contributions have already been indicated in the earlier sections. Narendra's leadership of the team of disciples was declared by Sri Ramakrishna himself. Narendra was obeyed by his brother disciples also. As such all agreed to his proposal for the formation of the Mission, but some of them did not like it at heart.

Swami Yogananda (Yogin) even charged Swamiji of introducing some foreign ideas, not consistent with Sri Ramakrishna's advice. In reply, Swamiji said, 'What little of the infinite ocean of ideas of Thakur have

you understood? He is behind me, I work under his guidance both here and in foreign land. Leave aside doubts, help me, you will find that His will is being fulfilled.' Yogananda refrained from further remonstrance and said, 'Doubts made me speak out, otherwise I always obey you.' He died early in 1899, but even during his brief life span he did set an example of renunciation and tapasya, and of service to the Holy Mother. Sri Ramakrishna's birth-anniversaries at Dakshineswar were arranged at his initiative. Thus, he played a part in accomplishing some aspects of the Mission's objectives.

Swami Adbhutananda (Latu) also told Swamiji, 'Why are you bringing in so much complexity? This will spoil meditation.' Normally he spent his time in meditation and stayed outside the Math. Through his life as well as his highly stimulating spiritual talks with householder devotees, he too fulfilled some of the aims of the Mission.

Swami Brahmananda (Rakhal) was quiet and meditative by nature. But during his tenure as the President of the Order, he inaugurated many Ashramas in different parts of India at the earnest request of devotees, looked after the cultivation of renunciation and non-attachment, and attended to the spiritual well-being of the monks and brahmacharins as well as their placement at different centres of the Order. All matters concerning them were managed by him through spiritual influence. Thus, he placed the members of the Order on a strong spiritual foundation.

Swami Premananda (Baburam) was pure to the marrow, a compliment given him by Sri Ramakrishna, who obtained him from his mother for his personal care. Baburam Maharaj felt deeply the touch of Divine Love and helped others to feel the same. Whenever he served others, he did so with total

self-effacement and dedication, and asked others to imbibe this attitude. Under his training, a bond of love did grow amongst monks and devotees, which became an asset for the Mission. Except for short pilgrimages, he stayed most of the time at the Math. Once he went to East Bengal and influenced both Hindus and Muslims through *kirtan*, spiritual discourses, lectures and his simple and unassuming behaviour. He inaugurated a few Ashramas also.

Swami Shivananda (Tarak) also was of a meditative temperament and used to feel the presence of God in all. He joined the Baranagore Math at its inception. Owing to an urge for pilgrimage and tapasya, he went on several occasions to various places, and in most of the places he visited, he served others through religious discourses. He also wrote booklets on Swamiji's ideas in Hindi, for distribution. Swamiji asked him to start centres at Colombo, Almora and Varanasi. Wherever he was present a sombre atmosphere prevailed. As President of the Order he inaugurated some Ashramas and held the first Convention of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in 1926. At different times he took part in plague relief at Calcutta, and distress relief at Darjeeling and Varanasi. Until the last year of his life when he suffered from a stroke which paralysed his vocal cords, he did not refrain from initiating sincere aspirants.

Swami Ramakrishnananda (Shashi) was sent by Swamiji to Madras, even before the Mission was started, to carry out the stupendous task of being the apostle to South India, which task also included the establishment of centres there. The sincere and ardent service which he offered to his Guru during his life time, continued in the shrines at Baranagore and Madras also, thus maintaining a place for meditation and assemblage of the disciples. He poured all his energy into the carrying out of this arduous task, which

ultimately took a toll on his life. His work involved holding classes and giving lectures at various places in English and in Sanskrit, the service to his Guru in the shrine room, the establishment and maintenance of the Ashrama, writing and distributing articles, making arrangements for conducting festivals, and rendering service to God in the poor. He published many books also. He took meticulous care in arranging the South Indian tours of the Holy Mother and Swami Brahmananda, thereby contributing immensely to the spiritual uplift of the people of South India.

Swami Advaitananda (Gopal Senior) was older than Sri Ramakrishna when he came to him and yet had the privilege of serving him and the Holy Mother. Once on his return from a pilgrimage, he made up his mind to offer twelve ochre cloths to men of renunciation. Knowing his intention, Sri Ramakrishna asked him to distribute them to eleven of his disciples present at Cossipore and to keep one for Girish. This was an initial step towards the formation of an organization of Sannyasins. He visited most of the important pilgrim spots in India. House construction and gardening work appealed to him and these he did as worship of God.

Swami Saradananda (Sharat) was by nature imbued with the spirit of service which, after contacts with Sri Ramakrishna, became permeated with a sense of renunciation. After the *mahasamadhi* of his Guru, he joined Baranagore Math and resorted to austere spiritual practices in the Himalayas and other congenial places. At Swamiji's call he devoted himself to preaching work in England and America in 1896, and later took over as the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission in 1898, under Swamiji's direction, which post he retained till the end of his life. His duties then comprised putting the various activities of the Mission in order; fund

raising for the purpose; maintaining public contact; training the new Brahmacharins in spiritual practices, in various ways of worship of the Lord, in the study of scriptures, in the repetition of the holy name of God and meditation on Him; managing all types of service work; establishment of new centres and infusion of mental and moral strength in them and finding solutions to human problems emerging from different work situations. Owing to the Mission's allowing some young men of noble character, disillusioned with revolutionary politics, to join it (the Mission), the then Governor of Bengal passed some unwholesome remarks because of which members of the public preferred to keep themselves away from the Mission. Through sober handling of the situation, Swami Saradananda succeeded in getting such remarks expunged from the reports.

Swami Saradananda took over the entire responsibility of managing Holy Mother's mundane affairs including Radhu's marriage, settling disputes among the brothers of the Holy Mother, and constructing dwelling houses for her at Calcutta and Jayrambati.

Swami Saradananda's memorable work was writing the analytical life history of Sri Ramakrishna with the title, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga*. Besides this he wrote a few more books, published the journal *Udbodhan* (Bengali journal of the Order), and brought out books from the Udbodhan Office. He delivered a large number of illuminating lectures in Bengali, Hindi and English. In 1926 he discharged a great responsibility by arranging the first Convention of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission at Belur Math to take stock of the first twenty-five years of work and to chalk out a future policy.

Swami Saradananda's self-abnegation,

and his respect for humanity were, indeed, remarkable. Normally, he became neither enraged nor annoyed, and for resolving human problems he used love as his main instrument. His leadership was based on good dealings and keeping his own needs to a minimum.

Swami Abhedananda (Kali) came to Sri Ramakrishna with a desire to learn yoga. As a result of this contact, he got all his desires fulfilled and was blessed with the opportunity of serving the Master. At Baranagore Math he was known as 'Kali the Ascetic' and 'Kali, the Vedantin'. His austerity led him through different parts of India. Once he secured some secret *mantras* which came in handy at the time of initiating the brotherhood to monkhood. At Swamiji's call he went to England and America in 1896 for preaching Vedanta. Being a forceful speaker and a good writer too, he could put the Vedantic work initiated by Swamiji on a secure footing. He permanently returned to India after twenty-five years and a few years later established a separate institution known as 'Vedanta Math' for preaching spiritual and temporal knowledge.

Swami Akhandananda (Gangadhar) during his contacts with Sri Ramakrishna learnt that too much of austerity is not effective, that prayers with dedication are more effective, and that to have an idea of God one needs to see the grand Himalayas or the vast ocean. So, after the *mahasamadhi* of Sri Ramakrishna, Gangadhar scaled the mountainous terrain of the Himalayas and went even to Tibet. He later wandered in different places of northern India. Observing the distress of the common people of Khetri, he conceived a plan for their amelioration and obtained Swamiji's consent letter in 1894, wherein Swamiji said, 'The poor, the illiterate, the ignorant, the afflicted—let these be your God.' Swami Akhandananda started a few schools there, influenced the king to serve

the people, and came back to the Math just before Swamiji returned from his first visit to the West.

Swami Akhandananda was not present at Calcutta when the Mission was inaugurated. He was on his way along the river Ganges. Crossing Palasi, he saw signs of famine. He spent the night at Bhabta Bazar. In the morning, when he was about to go farther, he heard thrice as if the Divine Mother was saying, 'Where would you go? You have much work here.' He, therefore, started serving the famine-stricken people and received both caution and encouragement. He wrote to Swamiji and to Swami Ramakrishnananda. In reply money and workers were sent and on 15 May 1897, the first relief work of the Mission was started. After famine, some children who had become orphaned became the focus of attention.

Swami Akhandananda started an orphanage, first at Bhabta in a thatched cottage, then at Sibnagar in *pucca* rooms. After fourteen years it was shifted to its own building at Sargachhi (District Murshidabad) with a big adjoining plot of land. The orphans were trained in agriculture, weaving, carpentry, and smithy to become self-earning citizens. Their physical and mental developments also were looked after by Swami Akhandananda who himself used to cleanse the children, feed them and nurse them when sick, thereby living up to the ideal: 'serve all beings as you would serve Lord Shiva.' Famine and distress relief works continued in different places. At times the number of Ashramites exceeded fifty. The youth of the locality, specially the students of Berhampur College came forward to participate with boundless inspiration.

Swami Akhandananda spent forty years of his life in this place serving the

villagers exactly as one worships God. During his last three years, he was the President of the Order. Then also he spent most of his time at Sargachhi, occasionally going to Munghyr, Bombay and Nagpur. He wrote learned and inspiring articles and a few books also. He used to say, 'At times I tried to find Him in places beyond human habitation, but now I am seeking Him amidst the sea of human beings.' His ideal was to execute small items of work in secret with dedication unto Him.

Swami Turiyananda (Hari) spent his early years practising Brahmacharya, living on minimum needs and keeping himself busy with studies on Vedanta and other scriptures. On the instructions of his Guru, Sri Ramakrishna, he modified his spiritual practices to a more balanced form. After the *mahasamadhi* of his Guru he joined the Baranagore Math, but being inclined to austerity and meditation, he went to various places in North India alone or with others. In 1899, Swamiji took him to America to acquaint the people of those countries with a Brahmin of a purely meditative temperament. He built the 'Shanti Ashrama' at a solitary hilly place fairly away from San Francisco. Normally he spent his days in deep meditation. He returned to India to meet Swamiji, and finding that Swamiji had meanwhile entered *mahasamadhi*, proceeded to perform tapasya at various places and live the deep secrets of the Upanishads. To fulfil Swamiji's desire, he founded an Ashrama at Almora and, on his own initiative, a Brahmacharya Vidyapith at Mihijam, which later took the shape of what is now popularly known as the Deoghar Vidyapith. He immersed himself in spiritual practices and in later life, while suffering from diabetes, he observed that all his sufferings were due to his avoiding the works propounded by Swamiji. Eulogizing the works started by Swamiji he would say, 'If one serves the sick and the distressed in the right spirit, in one

single day one can get the highest spiritual realization.'

Swami Trigunatitananda (Sarada) possessed a wandering temperament no less keen than that of others. But at Swamiji's call in 1899, he started the Bengali journal, *Udbodhan*, and from composing to printing and selling, he had to do everything himself. Over and above this, he gave discourses on spiritual subjects, conducted a Brahmacharya centre, and performed relief works at Mohula and Dinajpur. At Swamiji's call, again, he went to San Francisco for preaching Vedanta. There he established a 'Hindu Temple' and started work on the publication of the journal, *Voice of Freedom*. Every year he, along with others, went to the 'Shanti Ashrama' founded by Swami Turiyananda, and spent some time in spiritual practices and training. He breathed his last in 1915 in San Francisco under tragic circumstances.

Swami Subodhananda (Subodh) visited many religious places in India, both in the north and the south, and spent time in tapasya. At some places he visited, he talked about Sri Ramakrishna's profound teachings and served the distressed.

Swami Niranjanananda (Nirnanjan) was manly and carried a stick in his hand. He used to guard, during their last days, the doors of Sri Ramakrishna and later of Swamiji, so that visitors would not disturb them. Serving the sick or distressed was in his nature. He visited many pilgrim spots in northern and southern India and spent his days in tapasya, and in giving discourses on the glory of Sri Ramakrishna. He thus expanded the Mission's field of influence.

Swami Vijnanananda (Hari Prasanna) came into contact with Sri Ramakrishna in his younger days, but missed him very much when he (Prasanna) went to Pune for pursuing his studies in Civil engineering.

He joined the Math much later than the other brother disciples. Significant among his works were the construction of Math building and levelling of the grounds, constructing the embankment, preparing the plan for the Ramakrishna Temple at Belur Math according to Swamiji's guidelines, laying its foundation in 1924, and performing the installation ceremony of the Master's marble image in the temple in 1938. On Swamiji's advice he stayed at Allahabad, founded an Ashrama there and remained absorbed in study and spiritual austerities in his own way. He wrote a few books also. After assuming the charge of the President of the Order in 1937, he visited Ceylon, Burma, Peshawar and many other places, initiating devotees and talking to them on Sri Ramakrishna. Being requested to give advice, he would often say, 'First carry out the instructions you have read in the first primer.'

Conclusion

Truly the Ramakrishna Mission is a vehicle for the manifestation of the Divine Plan for rejuvenating the *Sanatana Dharma* through various paths: knowledge, devotion, performance of work in a detached manner or as worship, yoga, etc. as demonstrated in the life of Sri Ramakrishna. Even from before the Mission was started, each of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna dedicated his life in playing his part in the Great Universal Plan for the good of the entire human society—some laying more stress on the realization of the Atman within through 'internal' discipline, and others on the realization of Atman within all beings through the performance of selfless work amongst people in the 'external' world. Possessed of great spiritual insight and realization, each of them was a spiritual dynamo and gave solace and direction for spiritual growth to many weary souls. □

Laughter as Sadhana

DR. KAMALA S. JAYA RAO

Dr. Kamala S. Jaya Rao, a medical practitioner of Hyderabad, points out in this article that laughter which finds its purest and most innocent expression in a child vanishes from the face of most adults or finds a poor expression. 'Laughter is not an extraneous agent but a vital life process, an essential expression of life.' It is an expression of the inner joy and freedom of the soul. It is self-centredness, the eight fetters that bind the human soul, which make the adult appear joyless. Incarnations and saints were not morose; they were full of the joy of the Self within which revealed itself on their faces. Says the learned author, 'the stress of the modern, competitive life removes whatever capacity man retains to laugh. Disorders arising from stress can only be kept under check, to some extent, by drugs but cannot be cured by them. Psychiatrists and clinicians are beginning to appreciate the role of laughter in alleviating stress. A recent trend in big cities is setting up of laughing clubs and laugh-therapy units. The enthusiasm with which people enrol themselves reflects man's unexpressed need to laugh and be happy.' She continues, 'if laughter is the expression of the joy and freedom within, a smile is a door to that expression.'

In the early hours of the night, when the cacophony of the city traffic had almost subsided and the ubiquitous T.V. set had become nearly silent, there would drift in through my window along with a waft of gentle breeze, an extremely pleasant, tinkling sound. That was the mirthful laughter of my neighbour's little children. May be they had a secret to share, may be they were amused by a bed-time story, may be they were up to the last prank of the day, may be — wait, never try to seek the reason for a child's laughter. Worse still never ask a child the reason; it will only be bewildered.

Should there be a reason for laughter? It is the child's nature to laugh spontaneously. The child is one with its surroundings, animate and inanimate, and it laughs at anything that pleases it; and, anything on earth or in the skies can please it. A child's pleasure is not dictated by desires and therefore, its laughter is pure and innocent.

No more does that joyous sound steal

into my house and soothe my heart. The children are now in their mid-teens. In the exclusive company of their friends, they must surely indulge in gleeful or hilarious laughter but otherwise they mostly giggle. Soon they will be adults and they will forget to laugh. That is the tragedy of human life — losing the capacity to laugh with joy. Adults do laugh, no doubt. It is, however, generally a self-conscious, stifled laughter or a polite, forced laughter or a mocking, derisive laughter or a boisterous, raucous laughter.

Not all adults however lose the capacity to laugh with joy and spontaneity. The tribals, untouched by the so-called civilized society, laugh spontaneously, with mirth. They too, like little children, are one with their surroundings. Saints and Incarnations also laugh. One can never imagine a sad, morose or even a solemn Sri Krishna. He laughed in Brindavan, he laughed on the Kurukshetra battle-field, and he laughed even when Sisupala abused him. His legen-

dary pranks on sage Narada point to the fact that the Hindus do not disapprove of gods laughing. What makes Mahatma Gandhi's face appear so beautiful is the pure laughter on his toothless face. Indian poets describe such laughter graphically as a 'dance on the face'.

Jesus and Gautama Buddha too must certainly have laughed often. It appears that their latter-day followers (adults to be sure) did not seem it consistent with spirituality. Jesus must surely have kept his disciples happy at the Last Supper. We have historical proof of an Incarnation of the nineteenth century, bed-ridden with a debilitating, fatal physical condition at Cossipore, who continued to infect his young disciples with joy and laughter.

Many things may escape the eye and the mind of the reader of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, but the innumerable references to laughter in the book never fail to register. Sri Ramakrishna called this world a mansion of mirth and in His presence the mansion was exhibited in its fullest glory. Swami Vivekananda very significantly remarked that the Master's training was through fun and play.

We have it from Sister Nivedita's first-hand account that the Holy Mother, who lived a highly invisible and inaudible life, was full of laughter and that the Baghbazar house was a mart of joy.¹ The Mother would narrate to her devotees her early days in Calcutta, and how she mistook the hissing of air in an empty water-pipe for a snake!²

She would recount this incident not with embarrassment but with evident glee like a child that has made a surprise discovery.

The monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna were always full of cheerfulness. The extreme privation suffered at the Baranagore Math did not dampen their cheer and that house was witness to innumerable pranks, jokes and much laughter. Even later, when these young men grew up to occupy highly eminent positions in the Ramakrishna Order, they did not feign an ascetic look. To cite just one example we may recount the prank played by Swami Brahmananda to postpone Swami Akhandananda's departure from the Belur Math. He arranged with the palanquin-bearers to merely keep walking the whole night in the Math compound. At day break, an unsuspecting Swami Akhandananda alighted from the palanquin only to be greeted by his brother disciple³ and the latter surely had a mischievous twinkle in his eyes! Swami Vivekananda shocked his puritanical Western disciples and hosts by his boyish laughter. He would comfort them with a dead-pan face, that there were times he did not laugh, and those were when he suffered from dyspepsia!

Why does adulthood put a brake on laughter? Ego-consciousness completely takes over and man's attention gets diverted and concentrated on his body-mind complex. Man is no more in touch with his true self which is of the nature of absolute Bliss. His self-centredness and selfishness increase and he does not, any longer, identify himself with the universe. He is an 'individual' surrounded by things and beings, rather than being a part of them. His desires, emotions and passions are on the increase and he is

1. Sister Nivedita, *The Master As I Saw Him* (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 1997), p. 147; see also, Swami Chetanananda, *They Lived With God* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1991), p. 67.

2. *The Gospel of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, 1st Edn. (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1986), p. 30.

3. Swami Gambhirananda, *The Apostles of Sri Ramakrishna* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1967), p. 110.

bound by what Sri Ramakrishna refers to as the eight fetters.⁴

The stress of the modern, competitive life removes whatever capacity man retains to laugh. Disorders arising from stress can only be kept under check, to some extent, by drugs but cannot be cured by them. Psychiatrists and clinicians are beginning to appreciate the role of laughter in alleviating stress. A recent trend in big cities is setting up of laughing clubs and laugh-therapy units. The enthusiasm with which people enrol themselves reflects man's unexpressed need to laugh and be happy. What goes as laughter in these places is, however, more an exercise for the facial muscles and lungs. It may have its value, but it is good to know that it is not laughter. One cannot be taught to be happy and without happiness there can be no true laughter. 'Laughter is the best medicine', is a popular adage but not a correct one. Laughter is not an extraneous agent but a vital life process, an essential expression of life.

It is significant that man alone, of all creatures, can laugh, for, he alone can attain Self-realization, the discovery of the source of all happiness. Hence, saints and Incarnations were full of laughter. The life of Sri Krishna, full of laughter, even today resounds in the hearts of His devotees, for it was the depiction of the abandon of a free soul. Freedom is the source of all happiness.

M., the recorder of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, says that wit and humour are necessary in the initial stages of spiritual life.⁵ (Later they become essential characteristics.) He says that the Master would use wit and humour to help bring down the mental tension of His disciples and thereafter would lift their minds to a higher plane. So, laughter can be used as a form of *sadhana* (spiritual practice). No hilarity or excessive exuberance, but a mild laughter can be turned into a process of re-learning to become part of Nature.

If laughter is the expression of the joy and freedom within, a smile is a door to that expression. Those fortunate souls who saw and talked to Sri Ramakrishna invariably refer to His wonderful, beatific smile. Those of us who see only his picture are told, to our great sorrow, that there was something in that smile which no photograph has been able to reproduce.⁶

A sincere smile and a pleasant laughter can go a long way to defuse tension, be it in the home, in the work place or the street. It is a message not only to the world but also to one's own self that one is not a stranger who has strayed accidentally into this world. It re-echoes the famous message, 'no one is a stranger; the whole world is your own.' And what is spiritual life but to make and let all know that the whole world is one's own. □

4. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, 9th Edn. (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1988), p. 438.

5. Swami Chetanananda, *Ramakrishna As We Saw Him* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1992), p. 311.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 429.

When he sees Me, the Self of all, the knot of his heart breaks to pieces, all his doubts are dispelled, and his Karma is destroyed.

—*The Last Message of Sri Krishna*, chapter XV, śloka 30

All These Shine

Text for a Vedanta Mass, based on the Katha Upanishad

ADAPTED BY HIRANYAGARBHA

I

Two things alone can move a soul to act;
the good is one, the pleasant is another.

Blessed are they who choose an action well,
for those who seek the pleasant miss the good.

Someone whose heart does not discriminate
will lack, as well, all steadiness of mind;

such impure hearts cannot desire the good
but choose the pleasant, and are born — again.

The senses, say the wise, are wild horses —

on winding roads they travel our desires.

The Self made all the senses reaching out,
made them to gather what exist beyond

rather than find the one who's reaching out,

and so the self must close its eyes to see.

II

The Self is hidden deep in every being.
It isn't found by all in whom it dwells,

and least of all by those who neither rest
their scattered hearts, nor concentrate their minds.

Nor can the Self be found by subtle rays
of intellect, or in exotic books:

The one the Self has found will find the Self.

Here's what there is within a wise one's soul:
the senses do as the mind says
the mind does as the intellect says
the intellect does as the ego says
the ego does as the Self says.

Laying to build a bridge between its life
and all the infinite worlds it sees without,
the soul insists on going from birth to birth

following what dies,

until it knows itself as separate
from body, senses, mind — and, knowing this,

will never die again.

III

The glory of the Self shows us the self,
just as light from the sun becomes the moon's.

Knowledge is what becomes everyone
by whom the Self is known. All joy is theirs

who live, now, at the birthplace of all joy.

Knowing the Self the self knows all there is,
for there is nothing before or beyond the Self.

He shining, all these shine.

Śravaṇa to Darśana to Anubhūti

DR. M. SIVARAMKRISHNA

In this illuminating article, Dr. M. Sivaramkrishna of Hyderabad, who is not new to the readers of Prabuddha Bharata, points out that though religious life begins with 'hearing' spiritual truths and a certain measure of conviction is generated by 'seeing' this truth demonstrated in the lives of great personalities, one must strive for its culmination in 'personal experience'. The glorious transformation of Narendranath into the world-famous Vivekananda took several years. In this article, the learned author brings to light this transformation in the life of Narendranath. Devotees must 'go forward' on their spiritual journey, though how far they will be able to progress depends primarily on how well the 'soil' is cultivated. The cultivation of purity of the mind is a pre-requisite to spiritual experience and this fact can never be over-stressed.

It startled me the first time I read it, and every time thereafter, that passage from *Ramakrishna As We Saw Him*. It occurs in the reminiscences¹ of Kedar Nath Bandyopadhyay, a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. One day, Haridas Chatterjee, who was studying for his B.A. degree, stopped in to see Kedar and expressed his desire to introduce to him 'one of his fellow students' meaning Narendranath Dutta, the future Swami Vivekananda. Kedar's elder brother who lived in Meerut wanted Kedar to meet Sri Ramakrishna, about whom Keshab Chandra Sen had written in the *Sunday Mirror*, and to write to him all about this yogi of Dakshineswar. And so it happened that Kedar was the happiest man when Narendranath requested them all to visit the Kali temple built by Rani Rasmani. Narendra said:

Let us go and see that unlettered brahmin, who was previously a worshipper of Mother Kali and is now a perfected soul. It is very common in our country for people to pay money to see magic, but here, I understand, no charge is made. I

have been once before and, although this man has nothing to say to me that I want to hear, I would like to see him again.

Of course, Kedar was careful to add, 'As far as I can remember, Narendra spoke in this way.'

One is led to wonder whether Narendranath could have spoken so regarding Sri Ramakrishna about whom he, as Swami Vivekananda, held a very high view. Narendranath, the Calcutta boy as he used to refer to himself in later days, was a graduate of the Calcutta University, he had read philosophy both eastern and western, and had a thorough understanding of many subjects including history. He possessed a beautiful and able body and had also many talents which all evoked praise from his Master. It was but natural for Narendra to look upon Sri Ramakrishna as an *unlettered brahmin* and to hold that *this man has nothing to say to me that I want to hear*. Narendra subscribed then to the views of Brahmo Samaj and so did not believe in the worship of God through images. It must have struck Narendra as funny that this brahmin priest was *previously a worshipper of Mother Kali* and that it made him a *perfected soul*! Of samadhi, Narendranath had had no personal experience then. In fact

1. Swami Chetanananda, *Ramakrishna As We Saw Him* (St. Louis: Vedanta Society of St. Louis, 1990), pp. 365-70.

it was Professor William Hastie, the principal of the General Assembly's Institution, who while explaining Wordsworth's 'Excursion' introduced Sri Ramakrishna to his students with the words that this saint had had the experience of trance: 'Such an experience is the result of purity of mind and concentration on some particular object'. So, it was but natural that just as today's youth find no meaning in religion, Narendranath should have also spoken about such high states as of samadhi as *magic* and added humorously *but here, I understand, no charge is made*. But it must be admitted that he found in Sri Ramakrishna's presence something which not his words but his appearance conveyed. So he added, 'I have been once before... I would like to see him again.'

Great personalities like Sri Ramakrishna, some people have heard about, a few others have heard them, a smaller number have seen them, and a still smaller number have touched them, taken refuge in them and transformed their lives. As Sri Ramakrishna remarks, 'some have heard of milk, some have seen it, and there are some, besides, who have drunk it. God can indeed be seen; what is more, one can talk to Him.'² Narendranath had heard about Sri Ramakrishna, he had heard Sri Ramakrishna, and now he was keen on seeing the spiritual experiences that were manifest in him. He had yet to offer his whole being at his lotus feet and become blessed with spiritual vision and wisdom. But that is a later transformation in his life. Kedar went to Dakshineswar to see him so he could write to his elder brother about the yogi, and on witnessing the Master's samadhi Narendranath told him, 'now you can write four pages to your brother about the Master'. What is more, in Kedar's own words, 'it would be inaccurate to say

that I only saw—I actually got something.'

At Dakshineswar things took an interesting turn. Narendranath, who was always frank and outspoken, did not try to hide his feelings. He said, 'Sir, I understand that you have no education and that whatever you say you must have heard from someone else. I know all that stuff.' Very rude, the reader might remark. Narendranath did not feel differently about it. However, Narendranath spoke out only what he felt within himself. Compared to his learning, the Master had not much of learning to boast of. So, Sri Ramakrishna could only speak what he had *heard* from others and there could be little that was new in it. Sri Ramakrishna never disagreed, he had not read scriptures even but then how much he had heard! What was Narendranath's knowledge anyway? He too had read books or learnt from his teachers. There was no source of knowledge open to him other than these. Narendranath was to know later that there existed yet another source! That source was what Sri Ramakrishna had access to—his Divine Mother, who supplied to him all knowledge first hand. Sri Ramakrishna heard from his spiritual teachers sent to him by the Divine Mother Herself, learnt *first hand* from the Divine Mother, and spoke as one with authority from *within*, and not from the intellect as the learned pandits do. How Swami Vivekananda wished that he could forget all that he had learnt through the boasted institutionalized system of teaching and learning, that he could prepare his mind and gather facts at will! That illiterate brahmin priest had nothing to say that Narendranath wished to know. How Swami Vivekananda admitted that from every saying of Sri Ramakrishna, volumes could be written—and that was not eulogy, he actually demonstrated it, he confessed that any utterance of his which had done any good was the Master's and any that had done harm was his own! Is it not a wonderful

2. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1994), p. 344. See also pp. 368, 404, 417, 478, 829, 836. [Hereafter *Gospel*]

contrast to even muse over the fact that one day coming out of the Master's room, a mature Narendranath was to exclaim that he had indeed heard a wonderful truth from the Master—'*Siva jñāne jīva seva*, worship of man seeing God in him', and that, given a chance, he would proclaim it all over the world?

That was what became his thesis for practical Vedanta, the need of India then and now. Indeed Swami Vivekananda confessed that Sri Ramakrishna was not understandable by ordinary people (his own brother disciples not excluded) and that one could not put a limit on him. Swami Vivekananda took it upon himself to break open all barriers and represent Sri Ramakrishna as he truly was, not as men of limited vision perceived him. Regarding Sri Ramakrishna's worship of images and becoming perfected: Swami Vivekananda in his lectures spoke highly about image worship and voted for it if it would produce men and women who were of the spiritual stature of Sri Ramakrishna. We must not fail to observe that for his transformation into the world famous Vivekananda, Narendranath himself had to stand before the image of Mother Kali and witness Her divine presence and pray to Her for knowledge, devotion, discrimination and dispassion! Regarding Sri Ramakrishna's experience of Samadhi: Narendranath saw Samadhi in Sri Ramakrishna and learnt that spirituality could be communicated by a touch, a glance or a wish! It was no magic. Swami Vivekananda was indeed quite the opposite of Narendranath in his attitude to Sri Ramakrishna. Let us recollect Swamiji's touching words, 'After all, Joe, I am only the boy who used to listen with rapt wonderment to the wonderful words of Ramakrishna under the Banyan at Dakshineswar.'³ And in present-

ing Sri Ramakrishna before the public Swamiji chose not to present Sri Ramakrishna but his message. Once people accepted the message, they would also accept the person.

The idea 'hearing-seeing-assimilation' as we have said before was illustrated by Sri Ramakrishna with the analogy of milk. He also spoke about 'fire in the wood'⁴ (a jñāni is like one who knows beyond a doubt that a log of wood contains fire. But a vijñāni is he who lights the log, cooks over the fire, and is nourished by the food.). He also spoke about the search for the letter to know its contents only to set about procuring the items mentioned therein.⁵ We cannot but reiterate the need to hear about God (life and *līlā*) and hear his words of wisdom (the scriptures). However, a devotee must plod on till he goes to the end of the spiritual journey, namely, *anubhūti*, experience. As Swami Vivekananda repeatedly said, religion is realization, not empty talk.

The reactions of Sri Ramakrishna to Narendranath's 'rude' observations are also interesting. His Divine Mother had shown to him Narendranath even before he came to Sri Ramakrishna, even before he had taken birth. He had viewed Narendranath seated in meditation on 'the treasure of his heart', the 'divine Child', Sri Ramakrishna. So from the first day Sri Ramakrishna had conviction that 'my man had come'. He knew that Narendranath would later spread his liberal message all over the globe. So, he must have been amused to hear that Narendranath had not anything new to hear from him which he did not already know. 'I know all that stuff'. Sri Ramakrishna greeted that observation of Narendranath with the words, 'Then I will not have to talk much. If you come once in a while it will not do you

3. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), vol. 6, p. 431.

4. *Gospel*, pp. 288, 476.

5. *Gospel*, pp. 475, 694, 729, 882.

any harm. Besides, I like to see you... please come again.' Since Narendranath had heard all that he had to hear, or so he thought, it was necessary for Narendranath to see the practical side of religion, to see the manifestation of spiritual power in and through the person of Sri Ramakrishna. Narendranath got ample scope for that! For a person like Narendranath who was a learned man, it might not be convenient to come every now and then to see an unlettered brahmin priest, but certainly he could come 'once in a while' and 'that will not do any harm'! About that part of the statement, 'Besides, I like to see you... please come again,' we must not fail to note that Sri Ramakrishna loved Narendranath because he saw Narayana in him; otherwise, Narendranath was so poor that he and others like him could not even offer a tattered mat to sit on when he visited their home. So, these words really assert that Sri Ramakrishna perceived in Narendranath his true identity: that he was the ancient rishi Nara, incarnation of Narayana, born on earth to remove the miseries of mankind. Like a very sympathetic mother, Sri Ramakrishna devoted himself to transforming Narendranath into Vivekananda.

Coming to that comment of Kedar that he not only saw but that he 'actually got something', what was that 'something' he got? That 'something' makes the idea of 'only seeing' inaccurate. There is no need to speculate. The answer is obvious: hearing

gives way to seeing, and seeing gives way to an inner feeling, a divine surge, an inexplicable joy within. Regarding the first part of the above shift from hearing to seeing, Vaikunthanath Sanyal, another devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, says, 'Those who were content to hear his teachings instead of being in his presence seemed to me to have missed the mark. ... words might fade from memory but his form would leave an indelible mark on the heart.'⁶ What did Vaikunthanath see? Sri Ramakrishna's beautiful dancing, his superhuman renunciation, his passion for truth, his incessant spiritual activity, his samadhi, his boundless grace, ... The seeing of the radiant form of Sri Ramakrishna expressing immeasurable joy in communion with the Divine Mother kindled like feeling in the hearts of a few among the devoted and raised their minds to a higher plane. Only a few fortunate souls whose 'soil' (the mind) was well prepared and well irrigated could retain that experience and progress in their spiritual journey. Many struggled to retain it by life-long spiritual practises aimed at making such unique experiences 'their own'. Kedar must have got some such inner awakening but he was not without regrets, 'although I met the merciful Lord, I could not understand him. There is the element of time.' His 'soil' was, unfortunately for him, not so well equipped: 'I lament that I lost a precious thing because of youthful attractions.' It was not yet time for him. □

6. *Ramakrishna As We Saw Him*, loc. cit., p. 343.

Always remember this: the world belongs neither to you nor to me. It belongs to its Creator. Live in the world with the attitude that all whom you call your own — wife, children, friends, relatives — all belong to God. They are not yours. When you serve them think that you are serving God in so many different forms.

—Swami Shivananda, *Precepts for Perfection*, p. 131

The Prophet of the Global Village

A Meditation on Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi

DR. UMESH C. GULATI

Sometimes ordinariness does not catch the eye during the person's life-time. But as years roll by, this ordinariness itself reveals the underlying greatness of the personality. The life of Sri Sarada Devi, a spiritual dynamo under the cover of rural simplicity, has attracted the attention of many people the world over. The truths preached and lived by Sri Ramakrishna have shed much light over the years. Today, people—specially those with undisputed wisdom—see with greater and renewed conviction that the lives and message of these two personalities have all the potency to make humans grow into better world citizens, especially in the present age of intensely competitive and materialistic world.

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Introduction

The Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, has today become a household name. Over the years, many of her learned disciples, devotees, and admirers — men and women — have written biographies and essays, and given talks and speeches on her life and teachings. Most of all, a twin organization, Sri Sarada Math and Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, have been established which, completely managed by nuns, spread the Sri Ramakrishna-Sarada Devi gospel. The following essay is in the nature of a tribute to those earlier writers whose writings have made it possible for the world to see the ever-increasing relevance of the Holy Mother's life and teachings. In particular, this essay will emphasize her 'ordinariness' which is in striking contrast to all the previous prophets and saviours of all religions, and is the need of the present age of intensely competitive and materialistic world.

The revolutionary changes that have occurred in transportation and telecommunication have compressed the entire universe into a global village. At the same time, the globalization of international markets

and the adoption of the capitalist economic system by all nations have created an environment of cut-throat competition, unfettered greed, corruption and conflict. The philosophy underlying capitalism is self-love and self-interest which must be nurtured by rugged individualism, and driven by property rights and selfishness. The capitalist system is, therefore, at odds with the idea of brotherhood of man. The advent of the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, as the Incarnation of the present age, has occurred at the opportune time to precisely correct the imbalance by changing the ways and means to establish interpersonal ties. There is no precedent among the major religions of the world for an Incarnation or a prophet to be a woman, much less a householder. That makes the advent of the Holy Mother uniquely important and extremely relevant.

Concept of God

As Sri Ramakrishna has reminded us, God is both formless and with form, impersonal and personal. God is both male and female: *Ardhanarishwara*, Supreme Being as half-man, half-woman. Sri Ramakrishna

worshipped God in both the male and the female, and in fact, the female aspect of God, Kali, whom he referred to as 'Mother' appealed to him. For him the Divine Mother combined in Herself both the Absolute and the Relative, Brahman and Shakti, impersonal and personal aspects. According to him, these two different aspects of God, the Ultimate Reality, are not contradictory but complementary; they reinforce our understanding of God's nature. Even as water and its wetness or fire and its heat cannot be conceived in isolation, even so Brahman-Maya and Shiva-Shakti are inseparable. Shiva represents the passive state of Reality, whereas Shakti represents its dynamic aspect. It is an integral unity of Eternity and Time.¹

The Sanskrit word for nature is the feminine word *prakṛti*. It includes in the first place, the whole range of the objective world: human beings; trees and plants, animals and worms; mountains, oceans and rivers. Besides, this objective world, *prakṛti* includes the internal nature of man. If our internal nature is pure and divine, it finds meaning and purpose behind every aspect of the objective world, including our thoughts, speech, and actions. If the internal nature of man is impure, the whole world seems to us to exist in a state of chaos, devoid of any meaning: We are living in a global village today, but we are linked to one another only in a mechanical fashion with no sense of organic unity.

Sri Ramakrishna-Sarada Devi Incarnation

Sages and saints on the one hand, and demons and despots on the other, are two different facets of nature, the Divine Mother; one liberating and the other binding; one leading to immortality, the other to death. Sri Ramakrishna, the Incarnation of this age,

came into this world to lead humanity along the path of knowledge, liberation, and righteousness. He was the Incarnation of the Divine Mother, Kali, whose spirit animated him throughout his life. The Holy Mother always looked upon Sri Ramakrishna as Mother Kali.²

In the Holy Mother, we find the continuation of the Incarnation of the Divine Mother to form the Sri Ramakrishna-Sarada Devi Incarnation. In the words of Swami Ranganathananda, 'Sri Sarada Devi was both the disciple and helpmate of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna who played the roles of wife and nun, and mother and guru in one.'³ By worshipping the Divine Mother of the Universe in the person of his wife on the occasion of Shodashi Puja, Sri Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi, worshipper and worshipped, merged into a spiritual union. Thenceforth they became as one soul functioning in two bodies, and Sarada Devi assumed her equal share (if not the brunt of it) in the fulfilment of the mission of Sri Ramakrishna. Even then, during the lifetime of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother played a relatively passive role in providing spiritual knowledge to devotees sent to her by the Master. The Master understood that Sri Sarada Devi represented the female side of *Ardhanarishvara*, himself representing the male side. He knew that it was the Universal Mother Herself who performed all the activities, and that She, through his divine consort, fed him and many of his young devotees, massaged his feet, rubbed oil on his body, and looked after his mother until her death, and so forth. Her capacity to engage herself, with very little sleep, in the

2. Swami Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother*, (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre, 1962), p. 93. [Hereafter, *Holy Mother*]

3. Swami Ranganathananda, 'Sri Sarada Devi the Holy Mother,' in *Sri Sarada Devi: The Great Wonder*, (New Delhi: Ramakrishna Mission, 1984), p. 190. [Hereafter, *Great Wonder*]

1. Swami Ranganathananda, 'The Indian Vision of God as Mother,' *Prabuddha Bharata*, August 1991, p. 366.

service of the Master and his devotees lead us to believe that she indeed was the Universal Mother—untiring worker, a spiritual dynamo and an embodiment of Infinite Love. The Master threw some hints here and there about the Holy Mother's equality with himself and held that Sri Sarada Devi had much work to do: as the prophet, saviour, and guru in the whole world in her own right.

At one time he told Golap-Ma, one of the two Mother's intimate companions, 'She is Sarada, Saraswati; she has come to impart knowledge.' To his nephew Hriday also he said: 'My dear, her name is Sarada, she is Saraswati.'⁴ As Ann Myren has pointed out, these were not mere metaphorical statements, but these, coming from the Master who was established in Brahman, reflected the true personality of his divine consort, Sri Sarada Devi.⁵ Swami Gambhirananda, an early biographer of Sri Sarada Devi, adds that the word Sarada means the giver of *sāra*, or essence—the knowledge of Brahman.

God materializes in the bodies of Incarnations to teach humanity the path of righteousness, of liberation, and of immortality. Sri Ramakrishna was conscious of his mission, which was to teach humanity steeped in spiritual poverty in the midst of material abundance. He knew that his teachings were not meant just to liberate a select few young men and women who would renounce this world and seek God. Rather his teachings were directed at householders as well who stood in greater need of moral uplift and spiritual regeneration. He wanted to show to suffering humanity that achieving liberation in this life, *jivanmukti*, is a real possibility for householders; that they don't have to renounce this world and go on a retreat to a

mountain cave, practise austerities and meditation for years to realize God. Rather in his partnership with Sri Sarada Devi he demonstrated to the world how to be an *ideal* householder who does not renounce this world, but renounces *in* the world.

That, to me, highlights the personality of the Sri Ramakrishna-Sarada Devi Incarnation. It is the philosophy of inaction in the midst of action. It shows that the Primordial Energy, the Universal Mother, manifests Herself as much in the meditation of a monk or a nun, as She does through the activities of a perceptive householder, through his or her relationships with spouse and children, mother and father, friends and relatives, workers and bosses, and not the least, through interaction with the non-human part of nature, animate as well as inanimate. The Holy Mother demonstrated through her own life and activities, that our interactions with another don't have to be dictated by compulsion under a sense of duty towards our spouses, children, friends, or employers; such duty-inspired actions very soon become boring chores, exceedingly distasteful, oppressive and burdensome. In short, even a simple work becomes a drudgery. On the contrary, when our actions and interactions are dictated by a realization that it is the same Universal Mother who manifests through these activities, they become pleasant, creative, meaningful, and liberating. By consciously thinking of the living presence of the Divine Mother even in our most insignificant acts, chores turn into play and work becomes worship.

The Holy Mother's own service to Sri Ramakrishna is the testimony of this realization; she served him not because she was married to him; a marriage which the world knows was never consummated in the physical sense. Rather she accepted him as the Divine Mother, Kali, Herself. For Sri Ramakrishna, the inferior devotee thinks that God is 'there', whereas the superior devotee believes that God is 'here', in every-

4. Swami Gambhirananda, *Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi*, (Madras: Ramakrishna Math), p. 114. [Hereafter, *Sri Sarada Devi*]

5. 'Reflections on the Meaning of Sri Ramakrishna for Women,' *Prabuddha Bharata*, February 1992, pp. 93-100.(???)

thing and in all our relations. Sri Ramakrishna himself was witness to the presence of the Divine Mother in everything. Here is how the Master describes one of his rare experiences during the time he was a priest in the Kali temple at Dakshineswar.

The Divine Mother revealed to me in the Kali temple that it was She who had become everything. She showed me that everything was full of Consciousness, the marble floor was Consciousness, the altar was Consciousness, the water vessels were Consciousness—all was Consciousness. I found everything inside the room soaked, as it were, in Bliss—the Bliss of God. I saw a wicked man in front of the Kali temple; but in him also I saw the power of the Divine Mother vibrating. That was why I fed a cat with the food that was to be offered to the Divine Mother. I clearly perceived that all this was the Divine Mother—even the cat.⁶

The same was the attitude of the Holy Mother. The Mother rejected the idea of a God as a far-away Being or a mere philosophic conception by which to explain the world. On the contrary, He is the thread of the family, the link of society. He is love, the source of all growth, all sacrifice, and all unity. In short, 'Everything, no doubt, happens by God's will, yet man must work because God expresses His will through man's action,' said the Holy Mother in an answer to a devotee's question.⁷ The Holy Mother saw only God in everything. She saw the presence of God as much in Amzad, a muslim and a convicted thief, as in Swami Saradananda, a monk and a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, whom the Mother considered as one of her two 'burden bearers'.

The Mother saw that it was God Him-

self who sported through the actions of everyone, saints and sinners alike. Many of the mother's apparently insignificant actions reflect her inborn spiritual outlook. Even inanimate objects seemed to her to be filled with Divine Consciousness and therefore were objects worthy of respect. They were not very heroic activities in themselves as compared to one saving the life of a drowning child at the risk of his own. But such a behaviour is ordinary, yet it is not, on account of the divine undercurrent. The Mother's advent has demonstrated to humanity that this world, considered to be false, is a field of action. But action must be performed with the mind turned to the divine. She showed that there was no difference between an heroic act and an ordinary act when performed with the understanding that it is the Primordial Energy alone that works; only in ignorance, out of egotism, do we think that we are the doers. It is God alone who works through the actions of a person with worldly responsibilities; it is God alone who works as much through the meditation of a Yogi as He does through the actions of a social worker. Sri Sarada Devi also showed us that greatness lies not in the nature or quantum of work, not also in how much value the so-called market puts on it, but the attitude with which it is performed. By her own example she showed us what it is to be a karma yogi—, working incessantly, yet calling on God one lakh times a day!

Scriptures of all religions stress that God is love, and Sri Ramakrishna taught that God can be realized through love and as love. The Holy Mother demonstrated through her own life as a householder how best to express that love. In the words of Sister Nivedita:

...fancy worshipping a man as she worshipped her Husband, and never giving Him a glimpse of your face to make sure that He sometimes thought of you again! There is deep self-abnegation about it all that fills me with amaze-

6. Swami Nikhilananda (Tr.), *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, 1994), p. 15. [Hereafter, *Gospel*]

7. *Holy Mother*, p. 231.

ment.⁸

Truly, it amazes ordinary householders. Living as she did in the *nahabat*, a 50 square feet room which served as the bedroom and the supply room as well, and which the Master himself had described as a 'cage', she served Sri Ramakrishna and his innumerable devotees and disciples, working from early morning till 11 p.m. for almost fourteen years. One of the women devotees while visiting the Kali temple looked into her room and remarked: 'Ah, what a tiny room for our good child! She is in exile, as it were, like Sita.'⁹

While Sita spent most of her fourteen years in exile in the company of Sri Rama, the Holy Mother interacted with the Master from a distance of seventy-five feet, sometimes not seeing him for six months,¹⁰ though in spirit she was ever with him all the time. And yet the Mother described that period of her life in the *nahabat* as the best period of her life. 'How happy I was then!' she often remarked in reference to those days. 'The Holy atmosphere of the Ganges and the temples, service to the devotees, attendance on her husband, and her own spiritual practices and experiences lifted her mind above the physical hardship.'¹¹ For, the Mother rendered all this service to Sri Ramakrishna out of devotion. The Mother's life is a beacon light for householders, men and women, of the present age, illumining our way to peace, harmony, and a detached attitude for work regardless of our station in life.

That is what the Holy Mother was all about, the model of renunciation in action. Even for the quality of 'deep self-abnega-

tion'—to repeat Sister Nivedita's words—, she gave credit to Sri Ramakrishna whose teachings she was following. She was the first of his disciples whose keen observation led her to assert that renunciation was the essence of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings—, all other ideas, harmony of all religions, service of God in man, bird or beast, followed from the main idea of renunciation. To one of the devotees she said:

My child, what you say about the harmony of religions [that the Master taught] is true. But it never occurred to me that he had practised the disciplines of different faiths with the definite idea of preaching this harmony. Day and night the Master remained overwhelmed with divine rapture. He enjoyed God's sport by following the paths of the Vaishnavas, Christians, Mussalmans, and the rest. But it seems to me, my child, that the chief characteristic of the Master's sadhana was his renunciation. Has anyone ever seen such natural renunciation? Renunciation is his great ornament.¹²

Renunciation was the most shining ornament of the Holy Mother, too. In fact the Holy Mother never lost any opportunity of inculcating this idea of renunciation to anyone who came to her for spiritual instructions. She would say to them: 'Many think of God only after receiving blows from the world. But blessed is he who can offer his mind, like a fresh flower at the feet of the Lord from his very childhood. One should practise renunciation in youth.'¹³ The Holy Mother practised what she preached. Her mind, her life and her activities were offered like 'fresh flowers at the feet of the Lord.' Though she lived as a householder, she was neither attached to anything of the world (except her self-imposed bond, Radhu) nor did her worldly duties affect her natural

8. Sankari Prasad Basu (Ed.), *Letters of Sister Nivedita*, (Calcutta: Nababharat Publishers, 1982), vol. 1, p. 77.

9. *Holy Mother*, p. 56.

10. *Sri Sarada Devi*, p. 80.

11. *Holy Mother*, p. 56.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 216.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 216-17.

serenity and peace. Instead of being entangled in Maya, she was the queen of Maya herself; she was indeed Mahamaya.

Sri Ramakrishna has provided great insights into the secrets of realizing God even while we live as householders. Although he himself was married, he lived the life of an ascetic monk. He had the full knowledge of maintaining a household, interacting with people and so forth. In fact he himself trained Sri Sarada Devi in the management of secular affairs when she visited him at Kamarpukur. But he did not have any practical experience of maintaining a real household, relating and interacting with relatives, neighbours, and merchants. It is here that the other half of the Sri Ramakrishna-Sarada Devi Incarnation becomes relevant. In fact, that explains why Sri Ramakrishna wanted Sri Sarada Devi to remain after his *maha-samadhi* and demonstrate the Motherhood of God. By accepting to stay in the body after the Master had left his body, the Holy Mother demonstrated to the world through her personal life how our most secular duties can be performed as spiritual practices, how service to humanity is a worship of God, and how the everyday ebb and flow of life leads one to the divine summit.

The Mother's Household

The Mother's household at Jayrambati, her birthplace, where she settled, except for the period she spent at Udbodhan, Calcutta, was fairly large. It consisted of her mother, Shyamasundari (whom the Mother's devotees called 'grandmother'), uncle Nilmadhav, brothers, sisters-in-law, and nephews and nieces. The 'grandmother' was a pious lady and was always pleased to serve the Mother's devotees who came constantly to receive her blessings. Uncle Nilmadhav, old, never married, by then retired, and suffering from asthma, lived with her. She, in fact, became fond of him and gave him the best of the fruit and sweets her devotees brought for her. If someone protested, the all-

renouncing Mother would put them at ease by saying that the uncle had only a few days to live; let him fulfil all his desires. 'I shall live a long time and have many opportunities to enjoy these things.' What the Mother perhaps meant was that she had a long life in front of her to enjoy *the joy* she transmitted to others through her service. Besides, her method of teaching householders about the necessity of renunciation for spiritual-realization was through her own example of doing small things for others. There is more joy in giving than in receiving, more joy in renunciation than in possession. This is the deeper meaning couched in the life of the Holy Mother.

Except for her mother Shyamasundari and uncle Nilmadhav, the Mother's other relatives were essentially worldly: jealous, greedy, and selfish. They often quarreled with each other, but were united in their attempt to win the Mother's greatest favour for their individual interests and needs. But she accepted them all as part of the divine *lila* as she did her other innumerable spiritual sons and daughters, whom she called 'really my own.' The Mother herself was, however, without any 'worldly' attachment for any of them.

Of her five brothers, the youngest, Abhayacharan, left the family's priestly profession and was slated to be a physician. But unfortunately Abhay died prematurely of cholera. On his death-bed, he begged the Holy Mother for taking care of his expectant wife, Surabala, and the child. The Mother agreed to his request. After Abhay's death, a girl was born to Surabala and was named Radharani. Radhu, as she was affectionately called by everyone, became the apple of the Mother's eyes. She adored Radhu and tolerated all her childhood pranks. Surabala, who was called 'mad aunt' for being mentally unstable, also received preferential treatment despite her occasional disrespectful behaviour towards the Mother.

The Holy Mother's indulgence towards

her relatives in general, and towards Radhu and the mad aunt in particular, confounded not only her worldly relatives and neighbours, but sometimes even her disciples and devotees. Once a disciple remarked: 'Mother, why are you so obsessed with Radhu? Day and night you talk of nothing but Radhu. You seem to be terribly entangled in the world. Many devotees come to you and you pay no heed to them. Is such attachment good for you?' Such a remark coming from a disciple was not only insensitive, but was also utterly devoid of facts. Not only did the disciple not understand then the inner meaning of the Mother's affection towards Radhu, she also ignored innumerable examples of the Mother's love and compassion for all who came to her for spiritual guidance. It was in return for this genuine concern and affection that she showered on everyone, that they all, irrespective of their age, called the Mother their real mother. Besides, the disciples and others who looked upon the Holy Mother's love and compassion for Radhu as attachment, did not quite understand the true meaning of that term as well as of the Mother's spiritual stature.

In ignorance we fail to distinguish between a worldly mother and the Mother of the World. The worldly mother, especially one who has to care for a large family, children, in-laws, and relatives and therefore does not have any other social interaction, would be often tired, bored, and irritable. In such a household, wives find fault with their husbands, and husbands with their wives. The Mother of the World, on the other hand, remains unaffected by her multifarious activities, is calm and peaceful, and remains detached though seemingly attached. To use the Holy Mother's own words, 'When lightning strikes a building, the flash is seen in the glass panes and not in the wooden shutters.' She who works ceaselessly though disembodied, does so even when embodied.

Yogin-Ma, one of the Mother's constant

companions, found the Mother's deep involvement with Radhu and other relatives unlike that of the Master's detached behaviour. The moment such a thought occurred to her, Sri Ramakrishna appeared to her in a vision and showed her how the Ganges river remained pure despite corpses floating on it. The same way, the Master told her in that vision, Sri Sarada Devi was completely pure and detached inwardly, though seemingly attached with various family affairs. In an earlier vision to the Holy Mother herself, when she became so despondent and lost interest in life since the Master was no more, he pointed to Radhu and told her to make her the reason for living in the world and working for its spiritual emancipation.

Message for the Modern World

The Mother made clear to all her disciples that the real purpose of man's life is to realize God, the Universal Mother, and the practice of renunciation and other disciplines were essential for that realization. But renunciation does not necessarily mean that we should leave the world and spend most of the rest of our lives in meditation and contemplation on God. For monks that kind of renunciation is acceptable, though even in their case Swami Vivekananda had stressed the need for service to humanity as an essential supplement to their renunciation. A responsible householder with spouse and children, parents and relatives, cannot run away from his or her responsibilities of providing for them and giving them a loving care without expecting anything in return. Sri Ramakrishna scolded many such 'run-aways' and sent them back to fulfil their family obligations. Householders, he insisted, should study scriptures, understand their meaning, seek holy company, go into solitude occasionally, and live like brother and sister after the birth of one or two children. In fact he went to the extent of saying that practising spiritual disciplines as a householder was also like fighting the en-

emy of worldliness but from inside the fort, while the monk had cleared the deck for battle and stood in the open. Swami Vivekananda considered the householder's life as a laboratory and a training field for practising renunciation, selfless love and service.

Incarnations of all ages have taught humanity that life, though full of contradictions, has, for reconciliation, a divine plan behind all these activities and situations. These situations, behaviours and actions represent various episodes, scenes and segments of God's play, the divine *lila*. We all are mere actors, organically (not mechanically) connected with one another to fulfil a divine purpose. No activity or work is good or bad in itself; all that matters is that we all play our roles well and ensure the success of the play. If any of the scenes or acts is dropped from the whole play, it would be difficult to make any sense of that fractured plan; the world would become one great puzzle if the divine play is not kept in mind, and relationships would be dehumanized without any spiritual glue of love to hold humanity together.

There are instances in the lives of both Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi where their actions would seem to most of us unintelligible. Neither the Master nor the Mother reacted as ordinary men and women would to certain discomfiting situations which the Divine Mother herself, acting through them, had created. Instead, by their natural compassion, they cooled and diffused them. Seen in this light there does not seem any inconsistency in their behaviours. Very often teachers in secular subjects also simulate difficult situations to assign to their students different roles to deal with such situations. That is what Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi did to teach us spiritually. Conflicts and disputes that arise from some slight misunderstanding quickly lead to disharmony or complete breakdown of relationships between kith and kin, friends, relatives, neighbours, and nations. These

could be settled with the healing balm of love and understanding.

Incarnations and prophets who come to this world to teach humanity righteousness, morality, and the way to realize God, have to live and act like ordinary people in order to make their teachings relevant. That is the nature of all Incarnations; purposely they keep their divinity covered in mystery and it requires great effort, constant meditation, to unveil that mystery. If these Incarnations revealed their true nature, people would be intimidated and frightened by them and would not come close to them. The path they traverse would also lose relevance to the common people. That would defeat the very purpose for which Incarnations take the human birth. In the life of Holy Mother also, we find 'ordinariness' in her loving care of her niece Radhu, in her involvement with her greedy brothers and sisters-in-law, and other relatives. All this was part of a divine play. From the outside, The Mother looked as if entangled in Maya, but deep within she was constantly in prayer and Japa.

The Holy Mother was a true Vedantist. She had realized that man's real nature is divine, though its manifestation varies from one individual to another. Being an Incarnation, she was aware of her own divinity. For that reason, she found unity in diversity. She did not make any distinction between the sacred and the secular, the ideal and the practical, the spiritual and the material. Ordinary people once in a while get a faint glimpse of their oneness with the outside nature, and rush forth to express it unconsciously; for instance, by jumping into a river to save the life of a neighbour's child. This expression of oneness is what we call love and sympathy. This oneness is the basis of all our ethics and morality.

Sri Sarada Devi was the embodiment of love; she loved one and all, from Sri Ramakrishna to her niece Radhu, from the Master's disciples to her own disciples and devo-

tees, without distinction of caste, creed, gender, race, or country. Love was the Mother's second name; it was her very nature, it was spontaneous. In fact her motherly love embraced even animals, too. At one time she said that she was the 'mother of beasts, birds, and insects as well.' Her love was universal, selfless, and she gave freely never expecting anything in return. She worked ceaselessly serving all who came to visit her, and personally looked to everyone's special needs and comforts. Swami Premananda, a monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna once remarked that the Holy Mother

serves the visitors at Jayrambati, known and even unknown! She fetches water from the tank and even walks a mile to procure milk and good vegetables. Often she washes their dishes after their meals.... She has set the example of how to lead an ideal life in the world. How unattached she is in the midst of her manifold tasks! And never forget that she is the embodiment of the Divine Mother of the Universe.¹⁴

Many of her young disciples mentioned that the love they received from the Holy Mother surpassed the love of their own mothers. They also noticed that when they were ready to leave, the Mother would accompany them up to the end of the village and keep looking in their direction until they went out of sight. The indescribable joy that they felt whenever they were in the presence of the Mother is a testimony to her being the embodiment of love and bliss. Her overflowing love threw Sister Nivedita, Miss Josephine MacLeod, and other Western devotees of Swami Vivekananda into divine raptures. Once Miss MacLeod, returning to Belur Math after meeting the Mother at Udbodhan, was heard saying in whispers, 'I have seen her! I have seen her! I have seen the Holy Mother! I have seen her!' Could

there be a better tribute to the Mother's infinite love which overwhelmed those who were blessed enough to receive it?

The Mother was also full of compassion. At the death of Maku's son, the Holy Mother wept like any other ordinary person. She had the capacity of going into the very hearts of people and seeing how much anguish they felt when their children or relatives died. The Mother's compassion, not being attachment, was universal. She shed tears on Swami Yogananda's death, and prayed for the recovery of the near and dear ones of the people who sought her divine intervention. When she had satisfied her relatives' desires, she helped her neighbours in Jayrambati by purchasing fruits and vegetables from them.

And yet all this compassion did not diminish her natural humility. Once the village watchman, Ambika by name, an untouchable, asked her: 'People call you a goddess, the Divine Mother, and by other such names. I do not understand all this.' The Holy Mother in all compassion for Ambika replied: 'You don't have to understand. Just remember that you are my brother Ambika and I am your sister.'

The Holy Mother had a keen insight into human frailties and knew that through love and compassion these traits can be sublimated. She was not only the refuge of the forlorn and forsaken, she also set a model for good administration and had a practical sense for good government. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that even in giving charity one must practise discrimination. In the same way the Mother believed that a rigid enforcement of rules will destroy the bond of love that keeps an organization together as one organic whole. She believed that whether in a secular workplace or in a monastic order, love, not diplomacy; equality, not authority; and trusteeship, not lordship, are the keys to good administration. She was thus an early advocate of democratic, team spirit in organizations, and she was certainly

14. *Holy Mother*, pp. 131-32.

more advanced than not only her contemporaries but also the present-day management scholars. To her, democracy was not merely a form of government, but a supreme ethical ideal—a form of spiritual and moral association—that should govern all human relationships.

The Mother also provided some great lessons for the present-day policy makers who are guided more by the politics of the time than by practical common sense. Although the embodiment of love and compassion, the Mother did not allow her judgement to be affected by mere emotions and sentiments. A case in point is of a brahmacharin who offered an excessively high price to a milkman if he did not adulterate milk with water, a practice which is very common among milkmen in India. When the Mother came to know of it she severely scolded the brahmacharin for his foolishness and said: 'What have you done? Don't you know that you are raising the price of milk and making it hard for the villagers to buy it? It's the milkman's nature to mix water with milk. If the price is raised, he will add more of it to earn a higher profit.'¹⁵ The Mother had certainly not studied economics, but she surely had an uncanny sense of practical economic policy. She clearly saw in the action of the brahmacharin nothing but, what we call nowadays, a form of subsidy to producers. Governments all over the world waste an enormous amount of their countries' resources to subsidize the production of many commodities, including milk, sugar, corn, tobacco, meat, and so on, for the ostensible reason of raising incomes of producers. At best, they are mere palliatives. At worst, all they achieve in the process is the 'mountains of cheese and oceans of milk' which nobody wants. While people who receive subsidies get addicted to them and do nothing creative to get off them (they do not learn to uplift themselves

by their own efforts), the rest of the citizens must pay heavy taxes and high prices to finance the charities of their self-serving politicians.

Sri Ramakrishna taught the Mother during her early days at Dakshineswar to tailor her conduct to time, place, and circumstances, and the nature of the people she had to deal with. She was herself very flexible in adapting to different situations without flouting basic principles. We see a similar attitude of flexibility in Sri Ramakrishna who emphasized that the test of spirituality lies in the purity of heart and not in the mere observance of certain rituals and practices. Again and again the Mother indicated to humanity that the compassion of an Incarnation like herself was not limited to those who went through strict penance but that it extended also to those who were sincere in their everyday small actions.

Another uniqueness of the Holy Mother lies in the fact that she did not judge other people by her own standards, and never condemned anyone for their faults and 'sinful' acts. Rather, she came down to their level, and accepted them with all their virtues and faults. Her motherly love would reach the society's outcast and transform them. The colonial British rule had brought many economic and political changes in the country. Competition from cheaper foreign goods were destroying the domestic industry, and breaking down the old order, creating widespread unemployment, misery, and poverty in the country. For instance, people in the neighbouring village, not far from Jayrambati, used to earn their living from silk-making some years before, but competition from imported silk destroyed their trade and rendered them without work. As a result, these people often turned to theft and robbery to maintain their families.

This neighbouring village, like the rest of India's countryside of the time, had other problems as well. Throughout the British

15. Ibid., p. 293.

rule in India, and even before, the country was visited by periodic famines which left many people destitute. During one such famine in 1915, some of the starving Muslims from that village sought work in the building of the Mother's new house in Jayrambati. So the Jayrambati residents were naturally afraid of them. But Mother's overflowing love and compassion turned them into very diligent and efficient workers at the project. This did not remain unnoticed by the local residents, some of whom remarked that it was the grace of the Holy Mother that had transformed the character of even criminals and turned them towards God.

We ordinary mortals judge people only by their outward actions; only God, the Mother of the Universe, looks into their hearts and reads their minds. She alone knows who is good and who is bad. Ordinary people are quick to deliver judgement on the basis of what they know *about* a person. The Mother of the Universe gives Her judgement on the basis of a mother to her child. On a certain occasion, the Holy Mother said: 'Men, by nature [under the influence of Maya] do evil things. How few know how to make them good.' There couldn't be any better insightful commentary on the modern-day justice system and, indeed, on many of our institutions. Whether it is crime or disease, hunger or unemployment, drug abuse or illiteracy, we treat only symptoms but fail to go to the heart of the problem and cure it.

The well-known episode of Amzad in the Holy Mother's life has another message for humanity and a profound idea for the so-called social reformers. All over the world there are innumerable social problems of caste, race, religion, corruption, drug abuse, domestic violence, street crime, illiteracy, and so on. Mere political speeches from national leaders, appointments of high-level committees, and spending of an enormous amount of money from the na-

tional treasuries, cannot, have not and will not solve these problems unless they are handled with the attitude of love. So long as men deal with these problems in the spirit of duty and with the intention of satisfying their own ego, or to gain name, fame, power and wealth, these efforts will remain unresolved. It is love that binds people of different castes, classes, races and religions into a harmonious community. That love must be expressed the way the Holy Mother expressed it in her day-to-day relationships with people. Politicians talk glibly of public service, thereby glorifying all what they do, while in fact they often serve their own selfish ends. The Holy Mother, on the other hand, served her devotees, relatives and neighbours, day and night, without seeking any credit for it.

The Holy Mother often used to say, 'I am the Mother of the good and I am the Mother of the wicked.' Sri Ramakrishna used to say that Uncle Moon is the uncle of all. The significance of these two statements can be understood only if we recognize that God is not somebody out there in far away heaven, sitting in judgement and taking account of our virtues and sins. On the contrary, He is here, very near to us as our own Mother and Father, giving us protection and security, guiding us and nourishing us. And most of all, He is the Inner Controller, the Thinker of our thoughts, the Speaker of our speech, and the Doer of our actions.

The Holy Mother did not talk about her various acts of kindness and compassion, nor did she want to make public her spiritual experiences. Her general attitude was one of humility, and of complete self-surrender. She knew that she was the Mother of the Universe, and yet whenever a devotee asked her for her blessings she would always advise them to pray to Sri Ramakrishna; he alone would do everything for them. Only rarely did she let someone know her real nature. Once her cousin Sibbu, a small boy, accompanied her from Kamarpukur to

Jayrambati. As they approached the Mother's village, Sibbu stopped and would not proceed further until the Mother revealed to him who she *really* was. The Mother merely said that she was his aunt. That did not satisfy Sibbu, so he would not go further. The Mother could no longer hide her true nature. 'People say I am Kali', said the Mother. When Sibbu asked again to confirm what he had heard, she said, 'Yes, I am Kali.'¹⁶

In the present-day world of increasing materialism where people and nations flaunt their achievements in science and technology, wealth and weapons, to win friends, influence people, and dominate other nations, the Holy Mother, has this message for the public servants: love, and not the display of pomp and power, can enable humanity to live peacefully together in a global village. It is foolish for man to think that any of his material acquisitions and accomplishments is his own; every achievement is His. The Mother attributed everything to the Master; even her attainment of samadhi was the grace of Sri Ramakrishna. Unlike most of the modern-day administrators in almost every field revelling in competition, pomp, power and luxury, she did not publicize her spiritual experiences to project her image, gain devotees and win followers. Such a publicity would have created an aura of greatness and set her easily above the rest of humanity. That was impossible for a self-effacing personality like the Holy Mother. It would have been contrary to her mission of teaching householders how to live in a global village: in a spirit of communal harmony, held together by brotherly and sisterly love, in peace both inside as well as outside, and embodying the ideal of renunciation, self-abnegation, service and self-surrender to God.

The Holy Mother lived among people as one of them, a mother to whom one could

open one's heart without shyness or fear of being intimidated on account of one's many blemishes. She once said to a disciple in distress: 'Always say to yourself, I have a Mother [referring to herself].' As our biological mothers would not abandon us even when we behave in a most despicable manner, the Holy Mother never forsook anyone. She said, 'If my child has fallen into dirt, should I let him lie there? I will pick him up, clean him and take him in my lap.'

The significance of an Incarnation in the Hindu tradition is that it must convey to humankind a sense of the Infinite in a tangible manner. For that reason an Incarnation must speak the language of the people, live among them, and follow the culture of the time. There must be, as Professor Mahadevan has said, 'a happy combination of Supreme Divinity and easy accessibility—what are called in Sanskrit *paratva* and *saulabhya*—in an Avatar [Incarnation].'¹⁷ In the Sri Ramakrishna-Sarada Devi Incarnation, there was a confluence of *paratva* and *saulabhya*. Sri Ramakrishna lived in an exalted state, was like an unsheathed sword and only a few could approach him. In Sri Sarada Devi we find the other side of the nature of Ultimate Reality—easy accessibility. While Sri Ramakrishna projected his divinity through his monastic disciples and some others like Keshab Chandra Sen and Girish Chandra Ghosh, Sri Sarada Devi communicated her divinity through the veil of a simple village woman leading the life of an ordinary housewife. While Sri Ramakrishna humbled even the most noted intellectuals of his time through his spiritual insight and power, and charmed them and many other devotees by his divine madness, Sri Sarada Devi served her relatives, toiled for devotees, cleaned their laundry, washed their dishes, and provided every comfort as if she were an ordinary mother to one and

16. Ibid., p. 186.

17. 'Sri Sarada Devi and the Mission of India,' in *Great Wonder*, p. 218.

all. No wonder, in the words of Swami Vivekananda, 'It is a thousand times more difficult to understand the Holy Mother than to know Sri Ramakrishna.'

This uniqueness of easy accessibility, of the Holy Mother is precisely what fits the needs of the global village of today. Through her own life and activities the mother taught humanity in general, and householders in particular, how to look for unity in diversity, sacred in secular, and spiritual in material. Most of us hasten to judge people by their outward appearances and actions without going deeper into the reality that hides behind them. That does not unite people into a community of brothers and sisters, relatives, neighbours, and friends. Instead, it creates conflict and turmoil. Being physically so near to one another in this global village, these conflicts, competition, and turmoil become magnified with intensely devastating effects. The Mother's approach, on the other hand, was one of unconditional acceptance of everyone into the fold of love, harmony and peace.

Some of the respectable ladies frequenting the Udbodhan house objected to the visits to the Holy Mother of a certain woman who in their opinion was of immoral character. They said that if the fallen woman frequented the Udbodhan, it would be impossible for others to go there. The Mother immediately reacted: 'Those who have taken shelter with me are always welcome. If that stops the visits of some others, I can't help it.' On another occasion she remarked: 'The mind is everything. It is in the mind alone that one feels pure and impure. A man first makes his own mind dirty and sees another's faults.' As for herself, she said, 'I cannot see anybody's shortcomings.' When once someone commented on that attitude as not very practical, she said: 'The world will not come to an end if I refrain from criticizing others or from even speaking unpleasant truths.' What a remarkable set of statements! If we replace the 'I' in it

with the 'we', we can bring the kingdom of heaven on earth.

Although we have hinted at various places in the foregoing pages about the Holy Mother's philosophical thinking, yet our emphasis on her 'ordinariness' might give an impression that unlike Sri Ramakrishna she was not capable of understanding or talking about highly spiritual matters. Nothing will be farther from the truth. There is no doubt that the Mother emphasized the religious aspect of Hinduism a great deal. For that she used the personality of Sri Ramakrishna to instil faith among devotees and encouraged them to pray to him, the God Incarnate, here and now. The philosophical element, however, is more implicit in her actions and interactions with people. As was noted before, she saw divinity in everything; God to her is not only transcendent but also immanent. Her life was Vedanta in action. Sri Ramakrishna taught that 'A man should reach the Nitya, the Absolute, by following the trail of the Lila, the Relative.... After realizing the Absolute, he should climb down to the Relative and live on that plane in the company of devotees, charging his mind with the love of God.'¹⁸ The Holy Mother was the embodiment of that statement. She herself once remarked: 'In the fullness of spiritual realization, a person finds that the God who resides in his heart resides in the hearts of all—the oppressed, the lowly, and the untouchable. This realization makes one truly humble.'¹⁹ Indeed her last instruction to humanity, a few days before she left her body, was: 'Let me tell you something, my child. If you want peace, then do not look into anybody's faults. Look into your own faults. Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger, my child, the whole world is your own. This is the last word and testament for humanity, men and women, leaders and the led, on

18. *Gospel*, p. 257.

19. *Holy Mother*, p. 225.

living in peace and harmony in the global village of today.

Just a year before the arrival of Swami Vivekananda in Chicago to attend the Parliament of World Religions, a young American professor of philosophy at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, hardly 150 miles away, addressed a gathering of the Students' Christian Society. His name was John Dewey. Although he is recognized as one of America's great authorities in the fields of education, psychology, and philosophy, his ideas in the field of religion were more in accord with those of Swamiji's Vedanta than with Christianity as practised at the time. Dewey said:

The next religious prophet who will have a permanent and real influence on men's lives will be the man who succeeds in pointing out the religious meaning of democracy, the ultimate religious value to be found in the normal flow of life itself. It is the question of what Jesus did for his time. 'The Kingdom of God is among you,' was a protest against Judaism.²⁰

In this statement, Dewey was trying to reconcile the ethics of Christian religion with the ethics of democracy, and to reconcile religious life with secular life. 'The Kingdom of God is among ["within" is an alternative term in *Luke*, 16.20] you' means that Jesus was protesting against both the forms of institutional and personal religion that were empty of vital meaning and against the forms of social and economic life that were unjust and dehumanizing. For America of that time, this interpretation of historical Jesus and Christianity was downright radical. While such ideas brought him great recognition as an original thinker and social philosopher, they hardly endeared him to high theological circles. Obviously he was not a

delegate in the World Parliament of Religions nor did he know about its occurrence. Besides, while Dewey based his own interpretation of Christianity on his doctrine of divine immanence, without ever once acknowledging its recognition in India since the ancient times, the Christian establishment knew better; it rejected it for being pantheist and therefore blasphemous. In fact, Dewey was completely forgotten as a religious philosopher until very recently when Eastern religious ideas in general, and Vedanta in particular, became well established in America. It is no wonder that his modern American admirer, Professor Rockefeller, calls himself a Buddhist.

In the Incarnation of Sri Ramakrishna-Sri Sarada Devi, we see a prophet who exactly fits the conditions of John Dewey and meets the needs of the present-day global village. America of today is different from that of Dewey's time. In particular, racial and gender stereotypes are eroding; duties and responsibilities are no longer divided according to people's race or gender. Increasingly people are recognizing that our deepest social, psychological, and religious problems can only be dealt with by reconstructing both our religious life and social life, and in addition, by fully integrating them. The life of Sri Sarada Devi, as a householder, reveals to us that the value of a work cannot be measured by the value it fetches in the marketplace of the world. On the contrary, its worth depends on how effectively an activity leads us towards God. All work done, whether inside the house or outside, in that spirit becomes worship and blissful. For that reason, the life and teachings of the Holy Mother are relevant for men and women alike. The Holy Mother was the Ideal of the womanhood of India, indeed of the whole world. But more than that, she was the ideal of all humanity, particularly of householders, men and women of the world. □

20. Steven C. Rockefeller, *John Dewey's Religious Faith and Democratic Humanism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 164.

Humanism in the Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda

DR. P.V. DEVRAJ

Upon morality, the foundation of all religions, depends one's progress in spiritual life. While emancipation has been stressed by the followers of various religions, true spiritual perception forms the basis of all morality and ethics. A man endowed with such a realization cannot but serve humanity considering no sacrifice as beyond him. The author, of Calicut, bases this article on his research study on 'Neo-Vedantism of Swami Vivekananda'. He points out that 'Science and Humanism are two complementary aspects of human endeavour for the fulfilment of human aspirations', and stresses the need for humanism, which is based on spiritual realization, to avoid the pitfall of employing scientific findings along destructive channels.

A concern for man and his pressing needs is a new approach of contemporary philosophies. Such an approach is generally termed humanism. Humanism is not only a constructive philosophy but also a healthy attitude towards fellow beings. Such a philosophy aims at exploring the great potentialities and goodness in all human beings, helping them to attain to freedom, and thereby integrating them in the national development through the process of unification of individuals into groups and of groups of individuals into a nation. This humanistic orientation in the ethical ideas of philosophers constitutes a necessary and inevitable dimension in the philosophical field because they relate to development in the socio-cultural set up of the modern age.

The twentieth century has been witnessing marvellous achievements in science and technology, and hence it is rightly called the Age of Science and our modern civilization is described as Technological Civilization. Man in today's world is overwhelmed by the wonderful discoveries and inventions of science and consequently his general attitude to life has undergone a significant metamorphosis. A firm belief has developed that science would certainly unravel all the mysteries of the universe. The tendency of modern man is therefore to

judge even values—moral, aesthetic and spiritual—in terms of the standards of science and its modes: observation, measurement, and analysis. This morbid tendency precludes his attempt to look beyond the horizon of scientific truths and seek the ultimate truth based on extrasensory perception through moral perfection, observation—both internal and external—, analysis, and intuitive realization. Modern man, in trying to pursue science, ignores its linkage to humanism. However, Science and Humanism are two complementary aspects of human endeavour for the fulfilment of human aspirations. Hence, an attempt for their proper integration is the most urgent need of mankind today.

The interests of the individuals and the nation are to be in conformity with the interests of humanity at large. Though various organizations which exist today can help considerably in harmonizing diverse human interests, yet it is a fact that these organizations cannot function smoothly without mutual trust and cordial relation among their members. Thus, inner goodness of the individual is a necessary precondition for global unity. Nation building also boils down to the building of the character of its people, and requires the inculcation of a feeling of self-confidence and fostering of a

spirit of unity. It requires the promotion of ideal citizenship and a total development of human personality. All that an individual can do and should do is to make life happy not only for himself but also for the members of his family and the society as a whole. The integrity of a nation depends on the integrity of each of its members. So, the basic criterion for world unity seems to be a moral and spiritual one.

It is obvious that a man's quest for the realization of the inner essence of an individual was an important undercurrent of the various philosophies that appeared ever since the dawn of human civilization. It seems to be the perennial task of philosophy to discover, justify and uphold the genuine and sublime moral values, being rooted in which would enable man to realize his inner spiritual essence and thereby achieve healthy progress towards the highest standards of morality. Indeed, ethics is based on spiritual perception. Philosophy considers goodness as a moral value and advocates universal love which transcends all spheres of life and thus leads to a great vision of oneness of all existence. Humanism as a philosophy is concerned with the welfare of humankind—the blessing of an enlightened spiritual vision. Its aim is to help in socializing and civilizing the very life of man. This approach aims at revealing life's profound affirmation and is a new dimension in the field of ethics.

The ethical concepts of Swami Vivekananda were moulded mainly by traditional Indian spirituality seen in the person of Sri Ramakrishna and realized in his own life, and to some extent by his social background. The Vedas, according to Swamiji, are the books of total and ultimate knowledge. 'All knowledge is Veda, infinite as God is infinite.'¹ The knowledge in the Vedas are the most sublime, absolute and authoritative. Swamiji found that the truth contained in the Upanishads can be made practical leading to the all-round well-being and salvation

of humankind. A sound knowledge of the possibilities of spirituality made Swamiji believe that humanism needs a metaphysical basis to provide ultimate support. So, on the basis of these great texts, Swami Vivekananda expounded the purity, eternity and freedom of the human soul and the need to cultivate strength—physical, mental and intellectual—which will lead to moral and spiritual advancement.

Swamiji believed that the realization of the real nature of man, possible only for one whose life is based on sound moral foundation, is a pre-condition for an individual's acts of benevolence to society. The realization, though an other-worldly experience, yields benefit to humankind in this very world itself. The spiritual experience of the divinity inherent in all living beings is the basis for universal brotherhood. This is the important thrust in Swami Vivekananda's ideas on ethics.

According to Swamiji, each soul is potentially divine and the goal of life is to realize this divinity. Swamiji was inspired by the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita as well as the spiritual light received from his illustrious guru and his own personal experiences. He held that the human soul is pure, free and divine. He often quoted the opening verse of the *Īsopaniṣad*:

*Īśāvāsyam-idam sarvaṁ
yat-kiñca jagatyām jagat;
Tena tyaktena bhūñjīthā
na gṛdhaḥ kasyasviddhanam.*

All this—whatsoever moves on the earth—should be covered by the Lord. Protect (your Self) through that detachment. Do not covet, for whose is wealth?

The realization of the real nature of man is the ground of humanism according to Swami Vivekananda. Such an insight alone transcends all sense of inequality. The

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), vol. 8, p. 136. [Hereafter CW]

awareness of the divinity of the Self is the secret of man's development both in the individual and collective life, secular as well as spiritual life. Such a belief helps the individual to have faith in one's latent potentiality. Faith in oneself is the secret of man's growth. It is the source of all strength and of all well-being. Swamiji found that faith in oneself is the possible antidote for all weakness and degeneration. He said:

Teach yourselves, teach every one his real nature, call upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakes. Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come, and everything that is excellent will come when this sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity.²

When a man becomes aware of his divinity, he will become aware of the divinity in his fellow beings also. This insight will lead to a feeling of spiritual solidarity which kindles universal love. This oneness is the rationale of all ethics and of all morality.

The central theme of the humanism of Swami Vivekananda is this Vedantic truth. It requires man to see the Lord in everything, to see things in their real perspective and not as they appear to be to our clouded vision. God can be directly worshipped by serving Him in His human and subhuman forms. As Swami Vivekananda points out,

You may invent an image through which to worship God, but a better image already exists, the living man. You may build a temple in which to worship God, and that may be good, but a better one, a much higher one, already exists, the human body.³

This insight into the inner divinity enables man to transform oneself with a deeper understanding of divine love and with the growth of this love, human relation would improve, making the world a better place to live in.

Swamiji's emphasis on the divinity of human beings elevates the place of man in

society. In such a view all men living in a society are free and deserve equal opportunity. Equality and freedom imply breaking down of all privileges. Privilege based on caste, status, power and wealth are all barriers to progress. The idea of privilege is an obstruction to the realization of spiritual oneness of humankind. So Swamiji was opposed to every form of privilege seeking. He said, 'we must give up the idea of privilege, then will religion come. Before that there is no religion at all.'⁴

'Religion,' according to Swami Vivekananda, 'is the manifestation of the Divinity already in man.'⁵ 'Religion is realization; not talk, nor doctrine, nor theories, however beautiful they may be. It is being and becoming, not hearing or acknowledging; it is the whole soul becoming changed into what it believes.'⁶ He maintained that true practice of religion motivates one towards individual perfection and social uplift. Such a definition forms the basis of universal religion.

True religion does not consist in doctrines, dogmas or books, but it consists in realization. Religion is realization of the oneness of all existence and this forms the true basis of humanism.

We clearly see that scientific and technological achievements of man can be a blessing to humankind only if man is moral and spiritual. If he flouts all moral values and forsakes spiritual perception, he will employ his knowledge along destructive channels till it becomes a curse and a threat to humanity. This is what we find in the human situation of the day all over the world. Whatever be the development and progress in the objective fields of enquiry, a population acquires balance and stability only if its members are men of character and knit together basing their life on the principles of service and sacrifice. Herein lies the relevance of the humanistic approach. □

4. CW, vol. 1, p. 428.

5. CW, vol. 4, p. 358.

6. CW, vol. 2, p. 396.

2. CW, vol. 3, p. 193.

3. CW, vol. 2, p. 313.

Sister Nivedita's Concept of Freedom

DR. SANTANA MUKHERJEE

The learned author of Calcutta, in this lucid article presents the multi-faceted concept of freedom revealed in the lectures, letters and writings of Sister Nivedita. Freedom lies in renunciation but that renunciation must be preceded by conquest for the simple reason that it is only through conquest one gets something, and one can renounce only what one has. While freedom can express itself in many areas of human existence, they are all so many steps to the highest freedom called Transcendent Freedom. The West made social life free and it grew; the East made religion free and that grew. Both growths are essential to usher into existence a new type of people who have conquered nature both internal and external. That is the ideal placed before humanity.

To Sister Nivedita, a western disciple of Swami Vivekananda, freedom was the very breath of life, the most coveted thing in the world. In 1902, she wrote to Miss MacLeod: 'Life—Life—I want life. But Life is only translatable as Freedom. Without that Death is far better....'¹

Nurtured as she was in England, freedom meant much to Nivedita. Her life was quite alive to the Irish national cause. Later, witnessing the actual heart-rending condition of India, the flames of rebellion kept burning within her were directed to the cause of that subject nation. From Pestalozzi she had learnt that education was the only service one man could render another. To this she added the knowledge that India gave her: 'I have come to think,' she wrote, 'that we can also serve by making free.'² Amidst internal protests and revolts she finally came to understand the meaning of true freedom under Vivekananda's tutorage. Indeed, it was the outcome of a rigorous training, which she says was to subdue '...the protest of my individuality against becoming impersonal'.³

Liberty, to Sister Nivedita, is meaningful both as a social concept and as an ethical, spiritual truth. It is generally stated to be an atmosphere in which men and women have the opportunity to be at their best. Certain external conditions such as the rights enjoyed in and through society are said to be necessary for the greatest possible development of the capacity latent in the individual. 'Liberty,' said Swami Vivekananda, 'is the first condition of growth.'⁴ For attaining liberty, society, adds Nivedita, requires the service of its best men and women. And in this struggle for freedom is the path to one's self-development, the development of one's faculties, the flowering of the best elements in a person. Hinduism, she writes, uniquely recognizes that 'the real thirst of the soul is for freedom — and that this freedom is the essential condition of self-development'.⁵

The West, Sister Nivedita felt, had a very superficial understanding of freedom compared to the deeper implication the word obtained in India. The perfecting of

1. *Letters of Sister Nivedita* (Calcutta: Nababharat Publishers, vol. 1 & 2, 1982), vol. 1, p. 456. [Hereafter *Letters*]

2. *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 575.

3. *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 303.

4. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), vol. 4, p. 367. [Hereafter *CWV*]

5. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Sister Nivedita Girls' School. vol. 1-3, 1967; vol. 4, 1968), vol. 3, pp. 390-1. [Hereafter *CWN*]

life, the external social freedom of man had been the focus in the West. In India, on the other hand, liberty in social customs was never the goal of evolution. Life, she says, was valued in India if it expressed the freedom of the Soul. The world, she believed, was in need of this great conception of spiritual freedom. In Hinduism any restriction imposed by priesthood was social, resulting in rigidity of custom, but in thinking, Nivedita said, the mind was left eternally free.

Swami Vivekananda draws out clearly this difference in emphasis between India and the West. The West, granting liberty in social matters, had built up a splendid social organization. And India, allowing for variations in the approach to matters spiritual, had, in addition to the intensity and extensity of spiritual thought, an unrivalled spiritual power. Each had developed only one phase of humanity. India, he said, had now to shake the shackles off from society, and in the West, the chains must be taken off from the field of spiritual quest. Thus, India had to learn the conquest of external nature, and the West, the conquest of internal nature. Through this exchange, an ideal humanity which had conquered both the external and the internal nature of man would emerge. And in freedom — external and internal — there will be this wonderful growth and development of humanity.

True religion, according to Sister Nivedita, was the direct apprehension of the Ultimate Reality, that is, the realization of Truth. And the objects of the phenomenal world, received through falsifying media are so many refractions — aberrations — of the Ultimate Truth. In the Sister's own words, 'The purpose of the soul is to strike out into that ocean of light, which man has called God or Reality. It is that illumination which the life of the mind and the senses borrow and refract.'⁶ The Vedic dictum, '*ekam sat viprā bahudha vadanti*, Truth is One but sages describe It in various ways',

Nivedita is stated to have interpreted as signifying that 'the goal of realization is not the abstract, undifferentiated One, but the One which is manifested in the "many" and which can be realized through the manifold existence. The illumination which is called knowledge of unity is the gradual appropriation of truth by the whole nature of the seeker or the aspirant.'⁷

In the whole scheme of human existence, the Sister finds a place both for the absolute freedom of the individual which is *Mukti*, and the struggle for relative freedom in different arenas. 'Freedom,' says Nivedita, 'is indeed the supreme good of the soul.'⁸ She refers to the saying that the great may be distinguished from the little by the fact of the former's struggle for freedom.

According to Nivedita, man in his struggle through the world of relative existence grows to understand the absolute and abstract ideas of the underlying Truth (Existence Absolute), and makes himself ready for the supreme effort he is to make one day in attaining absolute liberty or *Mukti* itself. S. Radhakrishnan referring to Hindu Dharma writes in *The Hindu View of Life* that man does not live by bread alone or exclusively in relation to external nature. He lives and must live a life of the spirit. It is the fulfilment of the spirit which gives ultimate satisfaction, and towards the realization of this end all other activities are directed. To Nivedita, 'Each one of the minor forms of freedom is an image or symbol of that Transcendent Freedom....'⁹

Sister Nivedita believed that freedom,

6. *Sister Nivedita's Lectures and Writings* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Sister Nivedita Girls' School, 1975), p. 124. [Hereafter *Lectures and Writings*]

7. Amiya Kumar Mazumdar's article on 'The Quest of Philosophy: Nivedita' in *Nivedita Commemoration Volume*, p. 305.

8. CWN, vol. 3, p. 392.

9. CWN, vol. 4, p. 316.

in order to be realized, must be accessible *here and now in the midst of the tumult of struggle and search and problems and not after the change called death.* 'The Free and the Deathless is Now — eternally Now.' It was to be here and now in earthly life or never. We find the echo of the Swami's words: 'This earth, therefore, is the Karma Bhumi; it is this earth from which we attain to liberation,'¹⁰ in the words of his disciple, 'Nirvana is Now; it is Here.'¹¹ Salvation is to be reached in our present life.

Sister Nivedita does agree that the individual cannot rise to greatness apart from society, yet the struggle of every individual is to perform self-directed action — the basis of freedom — by repudiating the control exerted by one's fellow-organisms, that is, the pressures of his social surroundings. Society, she explains, was one of the forces, one of the powers from which the individual had to obtain his own freedom.

Man is born to toil, to see, to will and to attain. All through his life he struggles for freedom, a psychological feeling, which was to Nivedita, as it was to her Master, a sort of mastery. 'Really, bondage or freedom is in a man, not outside,'¹² she maintained. Freedom, she says, can only be achieved by those with free hearts and minds. Freedom that is identified with slavery to one's own impulse makes of men drunkards, gluttons and libertines. 'License,' she holds, 'is not liberty for the simple reason that true liberty presupposes mastery.'¹³ Desire, initially, is considered to be the spur of all human activity and the development of all his faculties. But when it yields to individual caprices, the Sister explains, it is no longer thought of as freedom, but seen as a disease requiring cure. To be free one must learn to control, to govern oneself. 'The free man is that man

whose will is efficient.'¹⁴ An essential condition of freedom is the liberty to realize one's own will. But real freedom, she writes, requires the individual to be free even of that will, and free as well from the desires of the body and the mind. The clue to the whole, she finds in the Swami's discovery of the word 'Manliness', which he held might often prove to be the whole of piety. This manliness-which-is-righteousness, writes Nivedita, involves a kind of *Mukti* — the manly man has not even the time to be conscious of his own manliness! The manly man is free from the pressures of his social surroundings, and though he may act in conformity with social norms, the choice is his own, and none can compel.¹⁵ 'The really great,' the Sister observes, 'are born with such assurance of their own freedom to withhold, that they are full of eagerness to give, and welcome every opportunity of serving as a privilege.'¹⁶ Such souls there have been in their own special fields of experience, like Mazzini, Joan of Arc, and many others, of whom Sister Nivedita says, 'In such a mood of uttermost blessedness, some have even suffered death by fire.'¹⁷

Man struggles all his life for freedom. And freedom when present, was manifest in two ways: renunciation and conquest. It had been hard, at first, for her to understand the Swami's gospel of renunciation. Later she was to write, 'When all selfishness, all littleness, all greed, has burnt itself away, and the man has become only the voice of the Chosen Idea of his life, then we learn what Renunciation is, what Devotion is, and again India stands supreme.'¹⁸

Vivekananda evidently believed that there were many forms of intense effort and self-discipline. In the performance of any of

10. CWW, vol. 3, p. 127.

11. *Lectures and Writings*, p. 125.

12. *Letters*, vol. 2, p. 1016.

13. CWN, vol. 4, p. 317.

14. Ibid.

15. CWN, vol. 3, pp. 391–2.

16. CWN, vol. 3, p. 391.

17. CWN, vol. 2, p. 153.

18. *Letters*, vol. 1, p. 282.

these duties to which one was called, was one's own true path. Renunciation lay in the total abnegation of self. To renounce, one must first conquer, for he believed that one can't renounce what one does not have. To conquer something, that is, to have it within one's power, Nivedita felt, one must enter into it to understand it, wrestle with it, make a sacrifice of life itself and be victorious; having conquered, one can then renounce it. The Swami had pointed out that this path was not easy but fraught with danger. In a fight against passion, the conqueror might become the conquered. An essential antecedent of renunciation, therefore, was conquest. To be independent of anything one must first be strong. Strength comes from the renunciation which follows the conquest. 'Everything,' says the Swami time and again, 'is fraught with fear: Renunciation alone is fearless.'¹⁹ And in renunciation, adds his disciple, one attains true freedom by transcending strength as well as weakness, for, weakness leads one downwards into deeper bondage; conquest over weakness gives one the strength leading outward into free air and liberty. 'True renunciation of anything is a step to *Mukti* (freedom),'²⁰ she would say. In the words of S. Radhakrishnan, 'Renunciation is the feeling of detachment from the finite as finite and attachment to the finite as the embodiment of the infinite.'²¹

Sister Nivedita dealt with the subject of freedom in all its breadth and dimensions, in all directions, reaching out to humanity as a whole. In depth and intensity, she refers to the spiritual freedom of man in the yearnings of the soul for freedom. National and individual freedom, as also the freedom of the soul and the state, none was left outside the purview of her study. Her feelings in-

deed were strong on the subject of Indian nationality. In her writings, Nivedita reconciles in a clever synthesis, finding a place for the different aspects of freedom. Together with man's yearning for spiritual freedom, she asserts his right to national freedom and the freedom of the individual within the body-politic. She further urges that freedom be given to all the peoples of the earth, that is, to the whole of humanity. Freedom for every individual, in every sphere of life will ensure, she felt, the fullest development of the human personality.

In the final analysis, Sister Nivedita declares humanity to be one,²² and the total freedom of man the one objective to achieve.²³ And the sense of nationality was only 'the local expression of the burning Love and thirst-for-the-service of humanity', 'free from the memory of war and conquest and aggression and violence'.²⁴

To the English mind, the Swami pointed out, the Freedom of the Soul stood translatable into some such thing as the Freedom of the State. The individual in the body-politic, Nivedita explains, enjoys rights furnished by the political unit, without which liberty becomes abstract — empty. Man cannot be free if he is not capable of thinking and acting for himself. Though the individual may thus strive for relative freedom, there was no absolute freedom for him except in *Mukti*. Man's longing for salvation is 'an inexpressible desire for the well-being of a metaphysical something' which the Sister feels 'it cannot conceive of, but calls the soul'. The final mark of freedom was in ceasing from the quest of freedom, for it is ever present. 'So to cease from the quest of *Mukti* is *Mukti* itself.'²⁵ The final achievement, she understood, was the annihilation

(Continued on page 159)

19. CWN, vol. 1, p. 329.

20. CWN, vol. 4, p. 316.

21. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life*, p. 79.

22. CWN, vol. 4, p. 361.

23. CWN, vol. 3, p. 391.

24. CWN, vol. 2, p. 405.

25. CWN, vol. 4, p. 360.

Swami Vivekananda on the Greatness of Hinduism

R.N. LAKHOTIA

Having crossed fifty years after her independence, India, a nation with a very hoary cultural and spiritual heritage, must look upon this heritage of many millennia with pride of achievement and not as a country which has lived just fifty years. A land that gave birth to many religious viewpoints and saw to it that these varied viewpoints did not give rise to sectarian conflicts but flourished with mutual acceptance, is today in the midst of a religious misunderstanding owing to the use of the foreign terminology: 'secularism'. The people of the land are also confused whether they should vote for temporal, earthly gains or go in for eternal life transcending the sense plane. This article by Sri Lakhota, an advocate and tax-consultant of New Delhi, discusses the religious viewpoints of Swami Vivekananda which highlights the glory of Hinduism and points to what Indians should do during this crisis in understanding.

One of the foremost ways of celebrating the Golden Jubilee of India's Independence is to take pride in being an Indian and working towards her glory. Every Hindu should feel proud of being a Hindu and remove the inferiority complex which has been caused by the glamour of the materialistic West, progress in science and technology and the wrong definition of secularism under which it has become fashionable for the educated Hindus to decry everything about Hinduism. It would do well for Hindus to remember today and for all time to come that Hinduism is a *great* religion, and this fact was emphasized by no less a personality than one of the greatest saints of modern India, Swami Vivekananda, who in his writings and speeches time and again dwelt on the greatness of Hinduism.

Hinduism is Based on Principles

Swami Vivekananda at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago (USA) in 1893 made several speeches bringing out the greatness of all religions, especially of Hinduism, and stated that Hindu religion alone can claim to be the universal religion. Swami Vivek-

ananda brought out before the world the clear fact that Hinduism was a religion based not on some historical characters but that it rested upon principles. This is what Swamiji emphasized:

At the same time, just as our God is an Impersonal and yet a Personal God, so is our religion a most intensely impersonal one—a religion based upon principles—and yet with an infinite scope for the play of persons; for what religion gives you more Incarnations, more prophets and seers, and still waits for infinitely more?¹

Resting as it does upon principles, based as it is on the scientific quest of Truth, it demonstrates: the futility of materialism; its own conclusions as scientifically based and experientially verifiable; its being the Mother of *all* religions greeting each as her own

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989), vol. 3, p. 183.

daughter.

Vitality in Religion

Swami Vivekananda strongly believed that a person could justify good and moral life only on the basis of spiritual vision. He emphasized that the Hindu's spiritual vision and wisdom needs to invigorate the people. In this connection, he said:

We have seen that our vigour, our strength, nay, our national life, is in our religion. I am not going to discuss now whether it is right or not, whether it is correct or not, whether it is beneficial or not in the long run, to have this vitality in religion, but for good or evil it is there; you cannot get out of it, you have it now and for ever, and you have to stand by it, even if you have not the same faith that I have in our religion. You are bound by it, and if you give it up, you are smashed to pieces. That is the life of our race and that must be strengthened.²

How was religion to invigorate the people? Not by theorization but by realization and practicalization. Religion must become living.

Swami Vivekananda knew about the strength of Hindu religion and also the weaknesses of its practitioners when it comes to actual practice. He, therefore, wanted that people should not merely sing the praises of abstract philosophical principles of Hindu religion but should *live* by its lofty conclusions. He wanted Hinduism to be explained to the masses in simple and practical language. This is what he said in this regard:

The dry, abstract Advaita must become living—poetic—in everyday life; out of hopelessly intricate mythology

must come concrete moral forms; and out of bewildering Yogi-ism must come the most scientific and practical psychology—and all this must be put in a form so that a child may grasp it.³

Spirit of Acceptance

Swami Vivekananda explained to the world that Hindu religion accepted all earnest religious approaches as true. He often used to say that the great philosophy of Hinduism or Vedanta respected the views of different religions because God called by whatever name is essentially one and resides in all creatures as 'Atman'. This religious diversity strung on the thread of spiritual unity is beautifully summed up in the Vedas as '*ekam sat viprā bahudhā vadanti*'. Truth is one but sages call it by various names. Swami Vivekananda said:

It is the recognition of this truth, which has enabled the Hindus to perceive the universal truth of all religions, from the lowest to the highest; it has made of them the only people who never had religious persecutions.⁴

Manifestation of Divinity

Swami Vivekananda explained to the world that God himself was present in all human beings. In fact, it is God who *appears* as the universe. He always used to look upon human beings as potentially divine. Therefore, if a person is not spiritual, he is not a Hindu. Swami Vivekananda said:

With Hindus, Jains, and Buddhists, in fact everywhere in India, there is the idea of a spiritual soul which is the receptacle of all power. And you know full well that there is not one system of philosophy in India which teaches you that you can get power or purity or perfection from out-

2. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 289.

3. Ibid., vol. 5, p. 104.

4. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 385.

side; but they all tell you that these are your birthright, your nature.⁵

Swami Vivekananda wanted this divinity to be *manifested* in actual life. He said:

Mere believing in certain theories and doctrines will not help you much. The mighty word that came out from the sky of spirituality in India was Anubhuti, realization, and ours are the only books which declare again and again: 'The Lord is to be *seen*'.⁶

Spiritual Strength

Swami Vivekananda detested the idea of a Hindu imagining himself to be weak. He wanted the Hindus—the individuals and the nation—to manifest strength. The true spirit of non-violence or *ahimsa*, according to

Swamiji, does not mean cowardice, but the strength of renunciation leading to the sacrifice of oneself for the good of others. This strength requires great conviction. We should remember the prophetic and inspiring words of Swami Vivekananda which point out the greatness of Hinduism:

Strength, strength is what the Upanishads speak to me from every page. This is the one great thing to remember, it has been the one great lesson I have been taught in my life; strength, it says, strength, O man, be not weak.⁷

It is Truth and Truth alone that gives this strength. Would to God that everyone who dares to call himself a Hindu rests on Truth, lives a life of renunciation and service, and works for the uplift of the nation. □

5. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 159.

6. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 377.

7. Ibid., vol. 3, p. 237.

Sister Nivedita's Concept of Freedom

(Continued from page 156)

of the limited, variously known as Freedom, *Mukti* or Nirvana. 'The idea that the perception of manifoldness is Maya or illusion, that the One is the real and the many unreal, underlies the whole theory.'²⁶

Sister Nivedita gave due importance to man's political freedom and to his yearning for spiritual freedom. In the context of her thinking on Indian nationality, she relates and finds a place both for national freedom and the conception of spiritual freedom,

which would be India's own contribution to the world thought. Thus, she writes: 'No man had the right to dream of Maya unless he had fought his way into the realization of that wonderful idea through labour and struggle and self-conquest to absolute detachment from self. No man should dare to speak of Yoga unless he had learned that the true Yoga was to be attained in every kind of work for the people, for the nation.'²⁷ □

26. CWN, vol. 2, p. 159.

27. *Lectures and Writings*, p. 343.

Arthashastra and the Foundation of Political Communication

DR. KIRAN RAMACHANDRAN NAIR

Dr. Kiran Ramachandran Nair, in this illuminating article, highlights the many aspects of political communication found in Kautilya's Arthashastra. The learned author concludes by saying that the work 'is undoubtedly one of the oldest works on statecraft and is a classic example of political communication. He [Kautilya] goes into the intricate skills of writing, its defects and excellences. He deals authoritatively with types of documents and decrees to be written. It is he who put forth the potential of communication to its fullest use in all its persuasibility in the administration of a state even before the West could theorize such concepts. He also laid down the framework for the law of defamation as we know it today. In fact, the whole treatise is the application of a unique blend of communication techniques in statecraft and is the foundation of modern political communication.'

Communication

Communication, recognized as a fundamental need of mankind, has progressed from its rudimentary origin to assume the proportions of an advanced and highly sophisticated art and science. It has made inroads into all disciplines of knowledge and has become fundamental in the pursuit of all knowledge. Its all-pervasive influence has swept aside traditional barriers to pave way for new practical applications. Communication skills have reached high levels of sophistication. Technological and scientific advances have lent the physical prowess needed to make possible the quantum leap in the field of communications. Communication, apart from transmitting information, has assumed the dynamic function of bringing about social change. The dynamics of politics is linked to the complex role of communication which is a vital instrument of social control in the form of public opinion. Public opinion demonstrates the power of communication through its ability to check the anarchic tendencies and despotic influences of those in power.

Political Communication

India's ancient history is replete with the glory and splendour of kings and emperors who ruled its lands. Transport and communication were not sophisticated as of today and this posed a problem to the rulers who wanted to convey their messages and policies to their subjects. Emperor Ashoka effectively used imperial edicts on stone pillars and rocks for communication of his thoughts and ideas. Daily events of interest and important news were depicted by small pictures drawn on the walls of temples in ink or colour which were easily removable.¹

The establishment of the Moghul rule in India saw the organization of communication along more advanced lines. Instead of the oral tradition of the announcements by town-criers, written reports were now in circulation. Those ancient reports could well be considered the precursors of modern newspapers. Rulers needed information from all quarters of vast territories under

1. Krishna Murthy Nadig, *Indian Journalism*, (Mysore: University of Mysore, 1966), p. 7.

their administration to frame policies, determine the welfare of the subjects, to gauge public opinion, and most important, to detect crises such as internal uprisings and treachery which were imminent threats to the kingdom.

The great Moghul emperor Aurangzeb established an efficient system of information offices. Newswriters were appointed at the bureau of intelligence maintained in every provincial capital. These newswriters known as *waquia navis* were responsible for recording the occurrence of important events in the districts. They were sent to the capital (Delhi) where the more important pieces of information were read out to the emperor.² Aurangzeb's army was also a good source of information. An interesting account is given by Niccola Manucci, a Venetian traveller, who lived in the court of Aurangzeb:

It is a fixed rule of the Moghuls that the *waquia navis* and the *cofia navis* or the public and secret newswriters of the empire must once a week enter what is passing in a *waquia*—that is to say, a sort of gazette or mercury containing the events of most importance. These newsletters are commonly read in the king's presence ... so that by that means he knows what is going on in his kingdom. There are in addition spies who are also obliged to send in reports weekly about other important business, chiefly what the princes are doing and thus they perform through written statements.³

These handwritten newsletters mentioned visits of the emperor to mosques and other holy places, hunting expeditions, details of the representations made to him and news items of similar nature. Secret informa-

tion was conveyed along with the general news whenever necessary.

Thus ancient monarchs had various means of political communication which helped in the administration of their vast territories. It was essential to establish and maintain effective lines of communication in order to administer the kingdom and protect it from internal and external aggression and intrigue which were common in those days. All great rulers used political communication to their advantage.

Today, the press serves as a source of public information, public opinion along with entertainment. It is one of the foundations on which democracy rests. Its influence on politics and public affairs is undisputed. The political significance of the press can be gauged from the range of communication functions it performs: information, advertising, entertainment and national integration. The press reports facts, interprets political events, provides commentaries on political questions, critically analyses issues and puts forth solutions. By virtue of its functions, it wields enormous influence on the policies and activities of governments.

Political communication is of vital importance in campaigns and in carrying on propaganda. It plays an important role in influencing and educating voters, formation of public opinion, focussing on critical public issues and in purging the administration of its evils.

Press criticism has largely been responsible in effecting reforms on various issues of social, political and economic importance. International relations are also shaped by the opinions formed during the course of political dialogue. The press is responsible for the future course of international politics by activating the public mind through its critical analysis of political performance and

2. *ibid.*, p. 7.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

commentary on current events.

The nexus between politics and communication and the importance of the press can be gauged from the words of the celebrated American President, Thomas Jefferson:

Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter.

Political Communication in Kautilya's Arthashastra

Political developments over the years led to the first great empire of India, that of the Mauryas, when for the first time most of the subcontinent was united under a single government. This period (c. 320-185 BCE) produced a Machiavellian system of statecraft associated with Kautilya.⁴

Kautilya, alternatively known as Kautilya or Chanakya, was the chief minister of Chandragupta Maurya, founder of the Mauryan dynasty in 321 BC, who ruled from about 321 to 300 BC with his capital at Pataliputra (in the vicinity of modern Patna). The date of the *Arthashastra* (a treatise on statecraft), according to the opinions of individual critics, ranges from 300 BC to AD 300. But it has been accepted as depicting a genuine picture of the conditions prevailing in the Mauryan epoch.⁵

Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, a text of which was discovered in 1909, is one of the oldest known works on statecraft and deals extensively with all aspects of administration of a state.⁶ Probably elaborated from the Mau-

ryan original and containing references to the economics and technology of a mean date c. 100 BC, it covers the entire gamut of statecraft with the statement of goals which, firstly, is to guide the ruler in efficient administration of his land and its protection (*pālana*) from aggression and, secondly, in evolving a sound foreign policy with the aid of which successful conquests can be made of neighbouring lands.⁷

The whole treatise focuses on the achievement of these two goals and offers practical solutions to almost every kind of obstacle that may be encountered by a ruler. Commencing with the careful nature required of a prince and the educational instruction to be imparted to him, Kautilya goes on to describe the appointment of ministers and other important officials, their respective duties and also gives a detailed description of various state departments, their organization and working. *Arthashastra* also covers legal aspects laying down a complete code of law dealing with civil and criminal offences. It also discusses the establishment of a secret service. There is an exhaustive account of the measures of foreign policy to be used under varying circumstances. He enumerates numerous ways by which rivals can be outwitted by stratagem, or overcome by force, and ultimately sets an ideal of a world conqueror (*vijigīṣu*) before the king. Thus Kautilya's *Arthashastra* deals comprehensively and exhaustively with internal administration and foreign relations before finally setting the ideal of a *vijigīṣu* before a king and enlisting the methods of achieving this lofty goal.

4. A.L. Basham, *A Cultural History of India*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 5.

5. R. Thapar, *Ashoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961).

6. H.J.J. Winter, 'Science', in A.L. Basham (Ed.), *A Cultural History of India*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 145.

7. R.P. Kangle (Tr.), *The Kautilya Arthashastra—A Study*, Parts 1, 2, 3, (Bombay: Motilal Banarsidass, 1960).

The *Arthashastra* is the wisdom of a long period of speculation on the science of politics and indicates the early rise and development of the guidelines for the administration of a state and its protection in case of internal unrest or external aggression.

The notion of political communication was not alien to ancient policy makers as it is an integral part of the art of administration. A close examination of Kautilya's *Arthashastra* reveals the intertwining of communication and politics from the dawn of early statecraft. In a highly centralized administrative system as that of the Mauryas, it was essential that communication be maintained with all parts of the subcontinent and with every level of society. Apart from land and sea communications, contact with the populace was maintained through agents and informants. They broadcast the ideas of the king and brought him reports on public opinion. Diplomatic missions were sent overseas by the Mauryan emperors and an exchange of envoys between the Greek kings of western Asia and Egypt and the Mauryas resulted in greater communication between these countries.⁸

The establishment of a secret service is vital to a political organization; secret agents were vested with the task of spying on the outdoor activities of various officers and sending the information to the spy establishments. Sign alphabets were used by assistants at the establishment to transmit the secret messages. Under difficult circumstances secret agents conveyed their information by means of writings concealed in musical instruments or through signs, recitations or songs.⁹

Remarking on gestural communica-

tion, Kautilya describes it as behaviour other than normal. Secret counsel could be betrayed by the gestures and expressions of officials. Ancient consultations reflect modern group dynamics. Kautilya specifically instructs the king to hold consultations with a group of three or four councillors—the reason being, (a) one councillor can do his best to have his way, (b) two may unite against the king or hold diametrically opposite views, (c) three or four can interact well to reach a balanced view, and (d) more than an optimum number may lead to complications such as not reaching an understanding or keeping a decision secret.¹⁰ These procedures in deliberations are often followed today at official political meetings where important decisions have to be made.

Kautilya devotes a whole chapter in his treatise to the topic of edicts. Royal edicts were used for giving directions or orders (*śāsana*) and were the principal means of communication of kings in time of war and peace. Writers of edicts or scribes were required to have the intellectual capabilities of a minister, be conversant with all conventions, be quick in composing matter and reading documents and have a beautiful handwriting.^{11,12} All commands of the king were to be followed carefully by the scribe and put down in writing in precise and polite terms with a mention of details such as the country, sovereignty, the family and the name in the case of a king, and only the name and country for all others.

Kautilya also describes the style of writing and choice of words to be used in the composition of a document. He enumerates the criteria of excellence in writing as the

8. *Ashoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*, loc. cit., pp. 40-1.

9. *The Kautilya Arthashastra*, loc. cit., Part 2, p. 13.

10. Ibid, Part 2, p. 34.

11. Ibid, Part 2, p. 92.

12. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri and G. Srinivasachari, *An Advanced History of India*, (Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1970), p. 113.

arrangement of subject matter, connection, completeness, sweetness, exaltedness and lucidity. Arrangement of subject matter is placing the statement of the principal matter followed by the rest in proper order. All statements should be connected. Completeness refers to description in detail for a full comprehension of the matter. Charming words conveying ideas with ease is sweetness of style. Exaltedness refers to the disuse of vulgarity. Words of familiarity lend lucidity to the composition. Kautilya's *Arthashastra* itself lives up to this style that he mentions.¹³

Kautilya refers to the different kinds of matters constituting written communication: censure, praise, query, statement, request, refusal, reproof, prohibition, injunction, appeasement, help, threatening and propitiation. Types of decrees consist of: documents of communication, command and gift; document of exemption and authorization; documents with news of happenings; and documents of reply.¹⁴

Kautilya enumerates the pitfalls in writing which a scribe should avoid: absence of charm, contradiction, repetition, incorrect use of a word and confusion. Unattractive and uneven writing with faint letters constitute an absence of charm. The rest of the terms are self-explanatory. These rules regarding writing of edicts were laid down by Kautilya to guide a king in all his communications.

It is surprising to find that Kautilya in his code of laws recognizes defamation as a serious offence. In his section on verbal injury he imposes fines according to the degree of the offence. The law of defamation is in force in modern times and is one of the

major components of press laws. Kautilya advocates a reasonable and justifiable check on speech.¹⁵

Communication has an important psychological effect and plays a vital role in wartime just as in peacetime. Kautilya instructs kings to summon all their troops before war. The king in his address to them should exhort them to defeat the enemy as the kingdom was to be enjoyed by the subjects and their ruler alike. Kautilya demonstrates the use of propaganda techniques in statecraft. In his treatise he asks the king as well as the minister and the chaplain to encourage the warriors by pointing out their superiority.¹⁶

Apart from these morale boosters, 'bards and panegyrists should describe the attainment of heaven by the brave and the absence of heaven for cowards, and sing praises of the caste, corporation, family, deeds and conduct of the warriors. Assistants of the chaplain should speak of the use of sorcery and black magic; mechanics, carpenters and astrologers (should speak) of success in their own works and failure in those of the enemy.'¹⁷ The commander-in-chief should after careful inspection of the troops announce monetary rewards according to their achievement in war. This would spur the troops to greater action.

In the section on 'Instigation to Sedition' (part 3; ch. 1; section 171) he gives the king a strategic plan to conquer an enemy by means of disinformation, rumours and propaganda. The king should use communication in such a way as to fill his men with confidence and enthusiasm and fill the enemy's side with fear and uncertainty. He should communicate secret information

13. *The Kautilya Arthashastra*, loc. cit., Part 2, pp. 92-3.

14. *Ibid.*, Part 2, p. 94.

15. *Ibid.*, Part 2, p. 246.

16. *Ibid.*, Part 2, p. 440.

17. *Ibid.*, Part 2, p. 441.

about their own territories to the chiefs, expose traitors to the enemy king. He should also send signs or signals about an event which should be communicated from foreign lands through domestic pigeon carrying a sealed communication.¹⁸ All these ominous communications should unnerve the enemy king.

Kautilya also mentions proclamations which could be made in the form of divine instructions during religious rites.

Soothsayers, interpreters of omens, astrologers, reciters of Puranas, seers and secret agents, those who have helped and those who have witnessed it, should broadcast that (power) of the (king) in his own territory.¹⁹

Disinformation about meeting with divinities, acquisition of treasury and getting military support from a divine source were all avenues of creating chaos in enemy territory. There should be predictions of victory for their side and reverse of it for the enemy.

Kautilya's policy of sowing dissensions, and instigating sedition for the purpose of gaining victory over enemies involve the use of stratagems in which communication plays a very important role. His enumeration of foreign policies under various circumstances involves highly complex communications which would be advantageous to the conqueror. All treaties had specific instructions on the kinds of alliances to

be forged and their role in war.^{20,21}

Communication irrespective of its form is the bulwark of politics. Kautilya skilfully demonstrates the range of applications of various techniques such as propaganda, persuasion, rumours, staged events, negative communication, disinformation, edicts, inscriptions and treaties in the stable administration and protection of a kingdom. Present-day political communication has the same aim in mind but many new and advanced means of communication such as television and radio are being utilized by governments in power to consolidate their position and secure favourable public opinion.

Summary

Kautilya's *Arthashastra* is undoubtedly one of the oldest works on statecraft and is a classic example of political communication. He goes into the intricate skills of writing, its defects and excellences. He deals authoritatively with types of documents and decrees to be written. It is he who put forth the potential of communication to its fullest use in all its persuasibility in the administration of a state even before the West could theorize such concepts. He also laid down the framework for the law of defamation as we know it today. In fact, the whole treatise is the application of a unique blend of communication techniques in statecraft and is the foundation of modern political communication. □

20. Ibid., Part 2, pp. 366-7.

21. 'Science' in *A Cultural History of India*, loc. cit., p. 145.

18. Ibid., Part 2, p. 474.

19. Ibid., Part 2, p. 475.

So long as even a dream-like perception of the universe and souls persists, do away with thy superimposition, O learned man, without the least break.

—Vivekacūḍāmaṇi, śloka 285

Behold 'It' in the Cosmos

DUSHYANTA PANDYA

This is a translation by Sri Pandya of a poem in Gujarati by the great saint-poet Narasimha Mehta who is believed to have lived in the 15th or 16th century. Though a bhakta by temperament, he has given expression to Advaitic thought through some excellent poems. Many of his padas are called 'Prabhātiyāns' (morning songs) and have a serene and slow cadence.

Sri Pandya, who writes biographical essays, criticism, light essays and translations in Gujarati, was awarded the first prize by the Gujarat Sahitya Akademi for his translation of Milton's epic 'The Paradise Lost'. He is closely associated with Sri Ramakrishna Jyot, a Gujarati monthly brought out by the Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot. We are grateful to Revered Swami Shuddharupanandaji Maharaj for his giving a shape to the translation.

Behold in the cosmos—That Being,
Who is everywhere, pulsating.

And which the 'Word' does state
I am That, I am That.

How I wish my life ends, remembering
the Lord, for
Apart from Him, there is none in
the world.

Though the Lord's grandeur are
so many,
Yet the intellect fails to perceive any.

Being charmed by the enchanting
endless maze,
The intellect loses its train, and
goes into a daze.

Know sentient and insentient are
all 'One'
Hold on to LOVE, then alone it can
be done.

In the shimmering light of the
rising Sun
Look at the golden orb emerging in
the heaven.

Thus, see Satchidananda
sporting gleefully
Swaying in the golden cradle,
so merrily.

The eternal light shines steadily
without a flick,
Even without a lamp or oil or a wick.

Without the eyes one sees IT
Though being formless one
recognizes IT.

And even without a palate
One yet enjoys the divine taste.

Eternal IT is, and which the mind
cannot comprehend
And IT sports all around, all over
without any end.

Narasimha's Lord is present
everywhere, within and without;
And only by loving Him,
saints have found Him out. □

News and Reports

Centenary Celebrations in North Bengal

Darjeeling is spotted with many memories of Swami Vivekananda and Sister Nivedita and yet these have not been given prominence during the past one hundred years. The Vivekananda Centenary Celebration Committee came into being in Darjeeling and the Bharat Anuragi Sangha was formed in Siliguri and Naxalbari to observe the following great occasions: (i) the centenary of Swami Vivekananda's triumphant return to In-

dia, (ii) the birth centenary of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, (iii) the Golden Jubilee of India's Independence, (iv) the centenary of the Ramakrishna Mission, and (v) the pre-centenary of Sister Nivedita's arrival in India. The Bharat Anuragi Sangha and the Vivekananda Centenary Celebration Committee held a four-day celebration (24 May 1997 to 27 May 1997) in Darjeeling, Siliguri, Jalpaiguri, North Bengal University and Naxalbari, as detailed below:



*The main function at the
Tourist Lodge (Hall)*

*The main function at the
Tourist Lodge (Hall)
Sri Subhas Ghising
delivering his speech*



Swami Lokeswaranandaji Maharaj (Secretary of the Centenary Celebrations Committee, Belur Math), Swami Prabhanandaji Maharaj, Swami Umanandaji, Swami Sivapradanandaji and others went early in the morning of **24 May 1997** to the palace of Maharaja of Burdwan at **Darjeeling**, where a bouquet was offered to the beautifully decorated picture of Swami Vivekananda, and *arati* was performed by Swami Lokeswaranandaji. A hundred years ago (in 1897) the palace was visited by Swamiji and his American disciples. Students of the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith (Purulia) [hereafter Vidyapith] residing in Siliguri chanted Vedic hymns.

At about 9:30 a.m. the team moved to Roy Villa, where Sister Nivedita had spent her last days and they entered the room where Nivedita had breathed her last. There was chanting and singing of a few devotional songs by the students of the Vidyapith. Swami Lokeswaranandaji and others garlanded the photograph of Sister Nivedita. This was followed by a group meditation. Swami Lokeswaranandaji then spoke eloquently on Sister Nivedita. The group then left for the Tourist Lodge Conference Hall, where a function was held with Swami Lokeswaranandaji as the Chief Guest and Sri Subhas Ghising as the President. The programme was inaugurated by Sri Subhas Ghising with the lighting of a lamp in front of Swamiji's portrait. Swami Umanandaji spoke in Nepali on the significance of the centenary celebrations, and Swami Prabhanandaji dwelt on Swami Vivekananda's 95-day stay at Darjeeling. Other speakers included Miss Santi



At Roy Villa

*Chanting by the students
of the Vidyapith*



Prodhan (Principal, Kurseong Sarada Mission School), Miss Tripti Roy (a student of a local college), and Sri S.K. Giri (an eminent social worker in Darjeeling). The address of welcome was presented by Mr. R.S. Tewari and the vote of thanks was proposed by Mr. Ranen Dutta (Secretary, Tea Planters' Association, Darjeeling). The programme was coordinated by Mr. J.K. Limboo.

The celebrations at **Siliguri** on **25 May** started with the *Prabhat Feri*, with students of different schools carrying cut-outs of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Ma Sarada, Swami Vivekananda, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Rabindranath Tagore, Sister Nivedita, Khudiram, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, and Bhanu Bhakta (the Nepali Poet). The procession went round the city and reached Siliguri Boys' High School. The main function was held with Swami Lokeshwaranandaji as President. Swami Prabhanandaji, Swami Umanandaji and Prof. Bikash Ghosh (Mayor, Siliguri) were guests of honour. The programme began with Vedic chanting by the boys of the Vidyapith and opening song by Miss Panchali Chakrabarty. Dr. K.C. Mitra (Chairman, Bharat Anuragi Sangha) delivered the address of welcome. Swami Umanandaji spoke on the significance of the centenary celebrations. The other speakers included Swami Prabhanandaji and Prof. Bikash Ghosh. Swami Lokeshwaranandaji delivered the presidential address. Sri Paritosh Chakrabarty (Secretary, Bharat Anuragi Sangh) presented the vote of thanks. Books were given away as prizes to the winners of the different cultural competitions on Swami Vivekananda.

On the same day, a function was held at Rabindra Bhavan, Jalpaiguri. After the opening songs, Smt. Pratima Bagchi (Secretary, Karma-seva Kendra) gave the address of welcome. Swami Lokeshwaranandaji was the president of the function and Swamis Umanandaji and Sivapradanandaji were the speakers. Sri Utpal Bhadra of Karmaseva Kendra proposed the vote of thanks.

Celebrations at **Naxalbari** on **26 May** began with a colourful procession by students of different schools and youth clubs. Most of the participants were Tajbansi tribals and Nepalis. The procession went round the town with cut-outs and tableaux of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Ma Sarada, Swami Vivekananda, Netaji and Bharat Mata. Six trucks with cut-outs and tableaux, and young children dressed as Bengalees, Assamese, Punjabis, Oriyas, Gujaratees, tribals, etc. proceeded to Nanda Prasad High School, the venue of the programme. Sri Anil Saha (Sabhadhipati, Siliguri Mahakuma Parishad) inaugurated the programme by lighting the lamp and garlanding the

portraits of Swami Vivekananda and Sister Nivedita. After the opening song by the students, Sri Tapan Sinha (Secretary, Naxalbari branch of the Bharat Anuragi Sangha) welcomed all present. The first-prize winners in different cultural competitions on Swami Vivekananda presented songs, recitations, tribal dances, etc. Students and youth belonging to the tribal communities presented folk dances. Little boys and girls of Primary Schools presented 'Bharatiyam' highlighting national integration. Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj (Vice President of the Ramakrishna Order) presided over the function and Swami Lokeshwaranandaji was the Chief Guest. Swami Umanandaji and Sri Anil Saha spoke. The participants, majority of whom were Nepali and Hindi speaking students, showed great enthusiasm.

A seminar was held at **North-Bengal University Conference Hall** on **27 May** at 5:00 p.m. After Vedic chanting by the students of the Vidyapith, Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj, Vice President of the Ramakrishna Order, inaugurated the seminar by lighting the lamp and offering floral tributes to the portraits of Swami Vivekananda and Sister Nivedita. Opening song was sung by Miss Panchali Chakrabarty, Moon Moon Khasnobis and Satyajit Mukhopadhyay. Sri Ranju Gopal Mukhopadhyay (Vice Chancellor, North-Bengal University) presided over the function. Swami Umanandaji spoke on the significance of the centenary celebrations. Sri J.C. Debnath (Dean, Faculty of Arts) delivered the address of welcome and Sri Jaswabanta Kar spoke on Swami Vivekananda's influence on Netaji. Swami Lokeshwaranandaji and Srimat Swami Gahananandaji spoke on the educational ideas of Swami Vivekananda. On this occasion a souvenir published by Bharat Anuragi Sangh was released by Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj and the first copy of it was handed over to Sri Ranju Gopal Mukhopadhyay, who during the course of his presidential address urged the Bharat Anuragi Sangh to celebrate the centenary of Sister Nivedita's arrival in a befitting manner and agreed to offer all possible assistance in this regard.

Commemoration of Swami Vivekananda's Visit to the Thousand Island Park in 1895

In a ceremony held at the Thousand Island Park main dock pavilion on Friday, 25 July 1997, the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York presented a bronze plaque to the Thousand Island Park Corporation to commemorate the seven-week visit to the Park in 1895 of Swami Vivekananda. The plaque reads: *In remembrance of the historic visit of Swami Vivekananda, Thousand Island Park, June 18 – August 7, 1895.* It was pre-



Plaque dedication ceremony: Devotees, members of the Thousand Island Park Community gathered at the plaque dedication ceremony. In the background is the Park Pavilion undergoing restoration. Swami Adiswarananda presenting the bronze Vivekananda plaque to Reverend Jack Andersen

sented by Swami Adiswarananda, spiritual leader of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, and was received on behalf of the Park by the Rev. Jack Andersen, president of the Thousand Island Park Corporation, and officers of the Park's Landmark Society and other organizations.

'The pavilion is significant,' said Swami Adiswarananda, 'in that it marks the place of Swami Vivekananda's arrival on 18 June 1895, as well as his special blessing of the Thousand Islands upon his departure on 7 August 1895.' In reply, Rev. Andersen paid tribute to Swami Vivekananda and stated, 'Thousand Island Park

is honoured to have played a part in the life of the great Swami. We continue to benefit from the sense of peace and tranquillity that is a result of having the Vivekananda tradition as a part of our Park community.'

Also present at the ceremony were more than 70 members of the New York Center who had gone to Thousand Island Park to take part in the center's annual summer retreat programme.

The plaque will be permanently installed on the Park's main dock pavilion, which is currently in the final phase of being restored to its original design.

The cottage in which Swami Vivekananda

stayed, now named 'Vivekananda Cottage', is maintained as a summer retreat, shrine, and holy place of pilgrimage by the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, and is visited by hundreds of followers and admirers of Swami Vivekananda from all over the world. Earlier, in the summer of 1995, the centenary of Swamiji's visit to the Park was celebrated. The theme of that celebration, representing the hallmark of Swami Vivekananda's universal teachings, was 'The Spiritual Unity of Humankind and the Harmony of Religions' (reported in *Prabuddha Bharata*, 1996, pp. 155-6).

Centenary Celebration of the Ramakrishna Mission

The Ramakrishna Mission, Singapore, celebrated the centenary of the Ramakrishna Mission along with the official opening of the Sarada Kindergarten by the Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister of Singapore, Dr. Tony Tan Keng Yam, on 5 July 1997. At the kindergarten, the newly installed statue of the Holy Mother was unveiled by Revered Swami Gautamanandaji Maharaj. This was followed by the releasing of one hundred balloons by the children. There was an impressive performance of singing a hymn and a song by one hundred devotees. The public meeting on 'Global Peace and Harmony and the Ramakrishna Mission' was addressed by Dr. Yam and other eminent persons. Dr. Yam also released the Kindergarten Commemorative Souvenir and a booklet brought out on the occasion of the Mission's Centenary. About 2300 persons attended the function.

The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, inaugurated its year-long programme to celebrate the centenary of the Ramakrishna Mission by holding a symposium on 8 August 1997. Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj gave the inaugural address and Swami Smarananandaji, the General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, presided over the function. Several eminent speakers spoke on the occasion.

The Ramakrishna Mission Sevapratishtan, Calcutta, observed the occasion along with the 66th Foundation Day of the institution from 24th to 28th July, 1997. A message from Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj, Vice President of the Ramakrishna Order, was read out on the opening day. Srimat Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj attended the cultural programme on the 25th and blessed the participants. A two-day scientific conference was inaugurated by Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj on the 26th. An exhibition of Swami Vivekananda's portraits, seminars, and a quiz on the life and works of Swamiji were also organized. The programme was well attended.

The Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Garbeta, conducted a public meeting on 23 July which was presided over by Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj. About 500 persons attended the programme.

The Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalyaya, Coimbatore, organized a programme in the city on the 27 July 1997 in which some distinguished persons addressed the gathering.

The Ramakrishna Math, Jamtara, held a free dental camp on 15 August 1997 in which 80 patients were treated.

The Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Purulia, celebrated the centenaries of the Ramakrishna Mission and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, the pre-centenary of Sister Nivedita's arrival in India, the Golden Jubilee of India's Independence by holding a series of programmes on and from 27 June to 29 June, 1997. The programmes included a students' seminar, a group discussion and valedictory function on 27th. At 8 p.m. that day, Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj inaugurated a youth convention. On the 28th there was a group discussion for the youth and a valedictory function. The 29th June witnessed a seminar for guardians of the students of the Vidyapith and a public meeting.

Internet Connection

The Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, has got an internet connection. Its E-mail address is: advaita@giascl01.vsnl.net.in.

Change in the Names of Centres

The name of Gadadhar Ashrama, Calcutta, has been changed to 'Ramakrishna Math (formerly Gadadhar Ashrama, Calcutta), Calcutta' and that of Ramakrishna Yogodyana Math, Kankurgachhi, to 'Ramakrishna Math (formerly Ramakrishna Yogodyana Math), Kankurgachhi'.

Sri Ramakrishna Math, Kancheepuram

The Math was shifted from Kancheepuram to a new site of four acres of land in Karaipettai village opposite to the Cancer Hospital on the Chennai-Bangalore Highway from 1 June 1996. The new Sadhu Nivas (residence for monastic inmates) was inaugurated by Revered Swami Gautamanandaji Maharaj, President, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai. A library building, constructed at a total cost of Rs. 10 lacs was declared open on 22 January 1997. Garments were distributed to 200 poor school-going children on this occasion. Sri Nandalal Tanta was the special guest and he distributed the garments.

Besides, the Math conducted daily worship, arati, bhajan. On all Ekadashi days, Ramanam Sankirtan was sung. Important occasions were observed through religious discourses. Special

(Continued on page 176)

Reviews and Notices

THE JOURNAL OF ORIENTAL RESEARCH, VOL. LXIII; *The Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute Golden Jubilee Publication, Madras, 1992-1993; 1996; pp. 200; Rs. 150/-, \$ 30, £ 25.*

The Journal of Oriental Research, vol. LXIII, is a Research Journal published by the Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute, Madras, on the occasion of its Golden Jubilee in 1996. The present issue of the Journal consists of nine scholarly papers, two of them in Sanskrit. A few of these were delivered as special endowment lectures at the Institute. The articles are followed by fifty-six book reviews devoted to the field of Sanskrit and Indology (vide Preface).

The first section of articles begins with a homage to Srimat Chandrasekharendra Sarasvati, Kuppuswami Sastri and others, highlighting their contribution to the development of Sanskritic studies.

The first article by Prof. P. Thirugnana Sambandhan gives an account of some aspects of Sanskrit and Tamil Grammar. The author has successfully shown the existence of a close affinity between *sūtras*, *pratyāhāras* and *anuvṛttis* given by Panini and those given by Tolkappiyar, a grammarian in Tamil language. After discussing various aspects of grammar in these two languages, the author concludes that 'India being one linguistic area, languages belonging to different families develop convergence as a result of mutual contact'. To him historical progress, social environment and geographical contiguity are responsible for such convergence.

The second article, 'Yoga for Every One—A Physiologist's View', by Dr. W. Selvamurthy is an important contribution in an important area of Indian philosophy which has much relevance to man in the modern age characterized by hassles and stress. It gives an account of eight components of yoga, *yama*, *niyama*, etc., which have tremendous importance in bringing about an individual's mental tranquillity. Some of the concepts of Yoga are compared with those of modern medicines.

The third article is equally important as it deals with the Geo-Scientific aspects of Vedic spiritualism. The Vedic seers offered their prayers regularly to the various geological agencies in the name of rivers (*Nadī*), rains (*Parjanya*), etc. In this connection, the author has highlighted the

Geo-Scientific aspects of Ṛg-Vedic deities. The great importance of this research piece lies in its dealing with the utility of rocks and minerals in temple construction and iconography.

The fourth article, 'Temple Rituals', by Prof. N.R. Bhatt presents a new angle in Indological research by concentrating on certain ceremonies through which the Divine power is invoked in an image. The images installed in the temples are personified as various gods and hence different rituals are prescribed. After the installation of the image, four types of rituals, viz. *nitya*, *naimittika*, *kāmya* and *prāyaścitta* are prescribed for performance. Though we are aware of the rituals yet generally we are not aware of the philosophical significance behind these rituals which include *kumbhābhiṣeka*, *karṣaṇa*, *rakṣābandhana*, etc. This article gives an account of the different ceremonies like *pradakṣiṇa*, *brāhmotsava*, procession of the chariot, etc. performed in the Śaiva temples. At the time of worship, many devotional songs composed by saints of the tradition are sung. The author has taken pains to observe the religious activities and to provide a beautiful philosophical analysis.

The fifth paper, on 'Astronomical Siddhāntas: Can They Be Corrected to Evolve a Uniform All-India Almanac?', is an attempt to discuss some modern scientific issues. It deals with two major topics: the amenability of ancient Indian astronomy to modernization and the relation between Jyotiṣa and Dharmaśāstra. The first topic is related to the revision of astronomical parameters and the method of computation. The second topic refers to the inter-dependence between Jyotiṣa and Dharmaśāstra. It also gives an account of the observation of eclipses, the astronomer's role, tradition of astronomical revision, etc. Though this paper is a little technical for a general reader, it gives tremendous insight for those who are engaged in astronomical research.

Dr. S.S. Janaki, in the sixth article, offers 'A Critique of Silā's Verse' which is devoted to a female poet, Silā, and to the five verses composed by her. These verses mainly depict the situation of a woman having a fickle-minded lover, anger of the beloved lady, the situation of an illicit lover separated from his beloved, etc. It deals with the fifth verse of Silā: '*yaḥ kaumāraharah*', which is cited by a few rhetoricians. The scholar has elaborated on various literary qualities of this verse as admitted by the *Ālaṃkārikas* and the tenability of the verses.

Dr. B.N.K. Sharma has devoted himself to

highlighting two major contributions of Dvaita Vedanta to Indian Epistemology in the seventh article which is really a philosophical essay. It deals with the views of the Dvaita philosophers on the view of *Svataḥprāmāṇya* and *Sākṣī*. The author does not feel hesitant to criticize the views of modern Indian thinkers like Professor Matilal, Professor D.M. Datta, and others from the Dvaita standpoint, which is a precondition of a philosophical paper.

The eighth paper entitled 'Bhāṭṭa-Vārtikam' is a critical analysis on the *Vārtika* of Kumārila Bhaṭṭa on *Jaimini Sūtra* and *bhāṣya*. This *vārtika* has the three characteristic features which an ideal *vārtika* should possess. The chapters on *Svataḥprāmāṇya* and *Vedāpauruṣeyatva* are important additions to the *Vārtika*.

The last paper is on the investigation of *Samavāya* which is a very significant relation in *Nyāya-vaiśeṣika*. This relation is called inseparable (*ayutasiddha*) as opposed to *samīyoga*. The Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsakas have accepted this as identity (*tādātmya*). To the Advaitins only Brahman is eternal. Other than this, no eternal substances like *samavāya*, etc. exist. However, the discussion of this topic is very interesting as it has been interpreted in different ways depending on the metaphysical presuppositions accepted by each system.

The Review portion of the Journal comprises a review of 56 books on different aspects of Indology. This portion does not provide justice to the books. The reviews of most of the books being very sketchy and brief, do not reflect the actual picture of the books.

In spite of this, the journal is a pioneer in the field of Indology and covers a wide range of topics on Indological research. I believe the Journal will forge ahead promoting research in the field of Indology. As there are very few journals devoted to Indological research, this journal has occupied an important place in the country, which it should continue to hold in future also. I congratulate the members of the administrative body of the Institute in general and the members of the Editorial Board in particular for bringing out such a beautiful scholarly journal.

Dr. Raghunath Ghosh
Darjeeling

'Books are those faithful mirrors that reflect to our mind the minds of sages and heroes,' Gibbon said. In one such book Sister Gargi presents the life of Swami Trigunatitananda (Trigunatita for short) which tells the simple yet fascinating story of one of the most beloved brother-disciples of Swami Vivekananda.

Swami Trigunatita was one of the sixteen almost superhuman characters who clustered around Sri Ramakrishna, each a gigantic spiritual personality superb in character, unique in achievement, and an asset to humanity. With the passing of days and added knowledge, such as this book provides, we realize more and more the importance of these lofty souls.

This is no ordinary biography. It is something more than just the story of a saint; it deals also with a very vital question: the function of spiritual power in human society. Swami Trigunatita was a dazzling combination of profound spirituality and effective action. Outwardly, he led a vigorous, active life. He managed a highly successful famine relief operation, started two widely appreciated magazines—the *Udbodhan* (Bengali) and the *Voice of Freedom*, founded 'the first Hindu temple in the whole western world', and faced the exigencies of a large and growing religious institution. Yet, inwardly, that life seems like a firm-set and abiding tower, based upon the rock of spiritual realization. The body worked and wore itself out in service; the spirit remained calm and established. Truly, Swami Trigunatita was a magnanimous soul who devoted himself to the spiritual unfoldment of people who came to him—a powerful Yogi and the servant of all. Great saints are like that: calm, impersonal, holding back nothing for themselves, existing only to transmit the tremendous power of God that rushes through them and gives light to the surrounding world. By nature a joyful spirit, Swami Trigunatita's whole life was a paean in praise of his master, Sri Ramakrishna.

Sister Gargi (Marie Louise Burke of *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries* fame) maintains in her latest work the same high standards her earlier six-volume magnum opus reflected with regard to accuracy of information. It is her belief that 'devotees have long hankered for such visual reports.' In her realistic account, every phase of the life and work of Swami Trigunatita has been examined faithfully and reverently but at the same time with intelligence and understanding. The character of Swami Trigunatita is portrayed as one of great sweetness and strength. Sister Gargi spent many years in the study of the subject and examined countless documents before she wrote this book. So its

SWAMI TRIGUNATITA, HIS LIFE AND TIMES, Sister Gargi (Marie Louise Burke); publ. Vedanta Society of Northern California, San Francisco; 1997; pp. 434 + xiv.

scholarship is unquestioned. Obviously a labour of love, the book is also a sincere tribute to those dedicated men and women whom the Swami knew and loved and who helped him in his work, by one of the most distinguished contributors to Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature.

The back cover of the book says:

Apart from telling the story of Swami Trigunatita's early life in India, this book describes how the dynamic and heroic monk, with complete commitment, devotion, and unconquerable will, fulfilled the mission given to him by his beloved Vivekananda. The story of his successful groundbreaking ministry in San Francisco forms a vital part of the early history of the Ramakrishna-Vedanta movement in America and is told here for the first time in all its colourful and often amazing detail.

We agree.

Swami Bhaswātananda
Mayavati

RG-VEDIC STUDIES, M. Sundarraj;
publ. International Society for the
Investigation of Ancient Civilization;
101 Mount Road, Madras 600 001; 1994;
pp. 527; Rs. 100/-.

Rg-Veda forms the basis of Hindu culture, tradition and religion. Western scholars like Max Muller have made valuable contributions to its study. Sāyana's commentary is traditionally accepted as the key for unlocking the secrets of the Vedas. Sri Aurobindo presents an allegorical interpretation in his *The Secrets of the Vedas*. M. Sundarraj, the author of the book under review, claims: 'After many years of study, I believe I have a very satisfactory solution of Rg-Vedic interpretation and I present them in the form of a number of studies which I call 'Rg-Vedic Studies'. The present volume carries five such studies (p. xxiv). We are afraid that his satisfactory interpretation may not appear satisfactory to all.

The author is critical of Sāyana as he considers his commentary to be ritualistic. But Indian tradition has all respect for this commentator. The translation in English which M. Sundarraj mainly utilizes is Griffith's. He has resorted to Wilson also where he finds it necessary.

The book contains seven chapters: Jyoti, Tamas, Space, Time, Life, Sound (Nada), Sakti (Power) and Purusa sukta. Every chapter begins with 'Author's Note' which presents the attitude of the author.

M. Sundarraj appears to be theistic and so he has made much of Puruṣa Sūkta. Nāsadiya Sūkta

which gives Indeterminate Absolute as the Reality has not been discussed at all. Philosophically, both Puruṣa Sūkta and Nāsadiya Sūkta are equally important. One presents the Cosmic view and the other the Acosmic views. Later on, Rāmānuja and other Bhaktivādī Vedāntins have followed the first one; Saṅkara, the Advaita Vedāntin, admits the second one.

Only some topics of Rg-Veda are discussed as the contents of the book reveal. There are many other topics which the author has avoided. The book is incomplete and incomprehensive. Srimat Anirvān's Veda mīmāṃsā in Bengali is definitely a better contribution to the subject. A reader will get the author's way of understanding Rg-Veda if he reads the book. Paper and print are good.

Prof. N.B. Chakraborty
Calcutta

MIND AND SUPERMIND, N.C. Panda;
publ. D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd., 'Sri
Kunj', F-32, Bali Nagar, New Delhi
110 015; set of two volumes; pp. 737;
Rs. 1000/- per set.

Prof. N.C. Panda is not unfamiliar to interpreters across boundaries. His earlier books *Maya in Physics* and *The Vibrating Universe* show considerable familiarity with the comparable areas of science and religions. The latter seemed to me a fairly well-argued book (notably the chapter on 'The Inverted Pipal Tree') though there is a tendency for indefensible generalizations.

The present book is an ambitious project. It arises 'out of a need for the synthesis of ancient Indian wisdom and modern science for presenting an integral picture of the mental world,' and 'Vedantic philosophy has been presented in a comprehensive and coherent manner and in this attempt the findings of modern science and modern psychology have been compared and contrasted'.

The intention is laudable but somewhat undemonstrated. The author claims 'whatever may be the veracity of the Vedantic psychology, one thing is certain that it has a holistic approach, that it is coherent, and that it explains all the mental phenomena successfully. It makes the man humane and resists and desists the attempt of deeming man as a machine.' It is curious that while doubting the veracity of the Vedantic psychology, he builds up an argument for its holistic nature. This dual if not paradoxical description marks the nature of the entire book. One could as well argue that in holism of any kind, machine

also has some role to play. Otherwise, it can hardly be described as holistic. Moreover, the very term holistic is a Western one.

But then the scheme of the work is quite impressive. Volume One consists of six chapters on 'Pure Consciousness,' 'The Potter's Wheel,' 'The Thinking Substance,' 'The Serpent Power,' and 'Supernormal Phenomenon.' Volume Two takes a close look with four chapters at the concepts of mind in Western religion and philosophy, in psychology, in science and rounds off the discussion by a chapter on 'Mind and Supermind'. A glossary, an obligatory bibliography (a notable omission is Sri Aurobindo who I thought naively should figure in ideas regarding the supermind). The book thus shows all the apparatus of a scholarly tome.

Such structure is daunting but only seems so. The comparable frames mostly get submerged in a profusion of jargon. Overly expository, they are rarely comparative and highly equivocal. One can cite the chapter on 'The Serpent Power'. The author writes: 'The psychic centres described in this chapter are all material; they are not immaterial. But, the matter of which they are made is too subtle to be perceived.' And an analogy is provided: 'Even though certain things exist they cannot be perceived by everybody. This happens in empirical science. Bacteria, viruses and bacteriophages cannot be detected by everybody.'

'That's exactly what happens for detection,' he says, 'of *chakras* and *nadis* or any other component of the subtle body. The *tantrik* seer has enough training and experience to observe the subtle body, whereas others untrained in the *tantrik* art and science are unable to know anything about what is subtle.' And the argument is clinched with *tantra* as the privileged counterpart: 'Science has not yet discovered this *prana* which is the mother of all sorts of energy.' Apart from the violent yoking of bacteria and *prana* there is a problem of science as a methodology and the problem is one of linguistic equivocation and conceptual laxity. In the same paragraph quite often the same word is used without any attempt at differentiating the discourses. For instance, 'matter' and 'training' are not the same in the two areas of science and *tantra* and to attempt a comparison without any clarity is to change horses in the mid-stream.

While assuming throughout the book that Vedanta is more inclusive, Prof. Panda is led paradoxically to adopt scientific methodology as an inescapable criterion, a unilateral one. Thus, instead of identifying different aspects of the serpent power, he goes all out at one stage to give us a resume of 'scientific' research done in this area by Dr. Hiroshi Motoyama, Dr. Nagahama,

Smyon Kirlian and others. Obviously, there is the anxiety to make the area sound acceptable to Western empiricism. This strategy is pervasive in the book and can be best described as ambiguity about the autonomy and referentiality of indigenous systems of consciousness, mind, etc.

It is unfair to be critical of a volume which shows scholarship and a fair grasp of at least the philosophical assumptions of scientific methodology in its Western setting. But it seems to me that Western is more or less correlated with universal and thus no indigenous frame is given its own logical and epistemological validity. In fact, comparative studies such as this are not so much comparisons as tacit interpretations invariably from the Western models. Distinctions are blurred, concepts are transposed and definitions made deliberately equivocal. Even the postmodernist would shy away from the random nature of linguistic signification so equivocal in the book. The result is claiming rather than showing (cf. the views on Vedanta).

This is all the more disturbing in the context of work done by many scholars on the science of cognition vis-a-vis science. One can cite David Bohm, Howard Gardner, and most recently Fred Alan Wolf. These are popular names but these have attempted a redrawing of consciousness maps and as Wolf cogently argues, quantum physics 'proves' even the existence of the soul! (*The Spiritual Universe*, 1996).

What promises to be an exploratory, pioneering study turns out to be largely a collection of random reflections, infrequently insightful. Finally, one longs for rigour and discipline in the quality of the book particularly when the printing and production are so good. (The book however, needs copy-editing at several places.)

Prof. M. Sivaramkrishna, Hyderabad

DHARMA: THE BEDROCK OF INDIAN CULTURE, D. Panduranga Rao; publ. Dharmajyothi Publications, C/o D. Naga Kumari, H. No. 19-48/2 Goutham Nagar, Malkajgiri, Hyderabad 500 047; 1996; pp. 183+xiv; Rs. 60/-.

The English language has no single word which will convey the meaning of *Dharma*. That is why D. Panduranga Rao did not use any lexical equivalent for it in the title of his book. *Dharma* according to him is the bedrock of Indian culture. The book is the result of the author's sustained study of Indian culture, not so much in its externalities as of its very essence.

The author takes a stock of the present situ-

ation in Indian society and states that the material progress that has been made here during the last fifty years has not contributed much towards the inner enrichment of the common man. Here he rightly quotes Tagore, 'Through *adharma* man prospers, gains what appears desirable, conquers enemies, but perishes at the root.'

The author has gone to the root of the disease and has prescribed some remedies. He draws our attention to the vision of our ancient sages and how they, the sages, placed before society the four goals: *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* and *mokṣa*. They insisted that *artha* and *kāma* should be well within limits laid down by *dharma* and *mokṣa*. *Mokṣa* should be the polestar during our worldly sojourn. The author further distinguishes between *pravṛtti dharma* and *nivṛtti dharma*, the latter being the way of attaining this summum bonum and says that a cultured brahminhood which will rise above casteism is what we need today. Brahminhood consists in the supreme experience of ultimate Knowledge, the Knowledge of Brahman.

The ways of worshipping the supreme Being is the subject matter of the fifth chapter. Here the author explains as to how the temple worship evolved during the course of centuries from the early Vedic sacrificial religion. This is followed

by a chapter on 'Tapas'. *Tapas* has a special role in religious life. It burns away impurities in personal life and adds to one's eligibility for supreme Knowledge.

According to the author, *varṇāśrama dharma* is a sort of Vedic communism and it can be practised sans casteism for a better and integrated society. He supports his arguments with various quotes from the Vedas.

The harm done by the proselytizing cultures is the subject matter of one of the chapters. Proselytizing, the author says, is anti-*dharma*.

In the concluding chapter the author, in retrospect, has stated that *dharma* can effectively help us in reorganizing the present-day society, not only in India but elsewhere also. The book speaks of the author's good intentions of revitalizing the various cultures that prevail the world over. The book goads readers to think independently on the issues posed in the book. This will help the well-meaning citizens to do something for the society.

The book can be recommended to the youth as an extra curricular reading material. Paper and printing are good and the price reasonable.

Dr. N.B. Patil
Mumbai

News and Reports

(Continued from page 171)

pujas and bhajans marked important festivals like Ramanavami, Sri Krishna Jayanti, Maha Sivaratri and Sri Sri Durga Puja. The birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda were celebrated with *homa*, special puja and bhajan. About 200 devotees participated on each of the Jayanti days and they were given *prasad*. Durga Puja was performed according to South Indian tradition but in an image. The deities were taken in procession on the Vijaya Dashami day to the nearby villages. During the procession about 100 persons offered puja to the Divine Mother.

Poor Feeding: From 1 April 1996 till the date of shifting to the new site, twenty orphan students of Thiruvalluvar Gurukulam were supplied with nutritious food on all Thursdays and Ekadashi days. From 1 June 1996 about 100 poor school-going children residing in the nearby villages were fed every evening with sumptuous food. These students were also given free tuition. Fifty selected students were supplied with text books and note books.

Middle School at Malliankaranai Upgraded

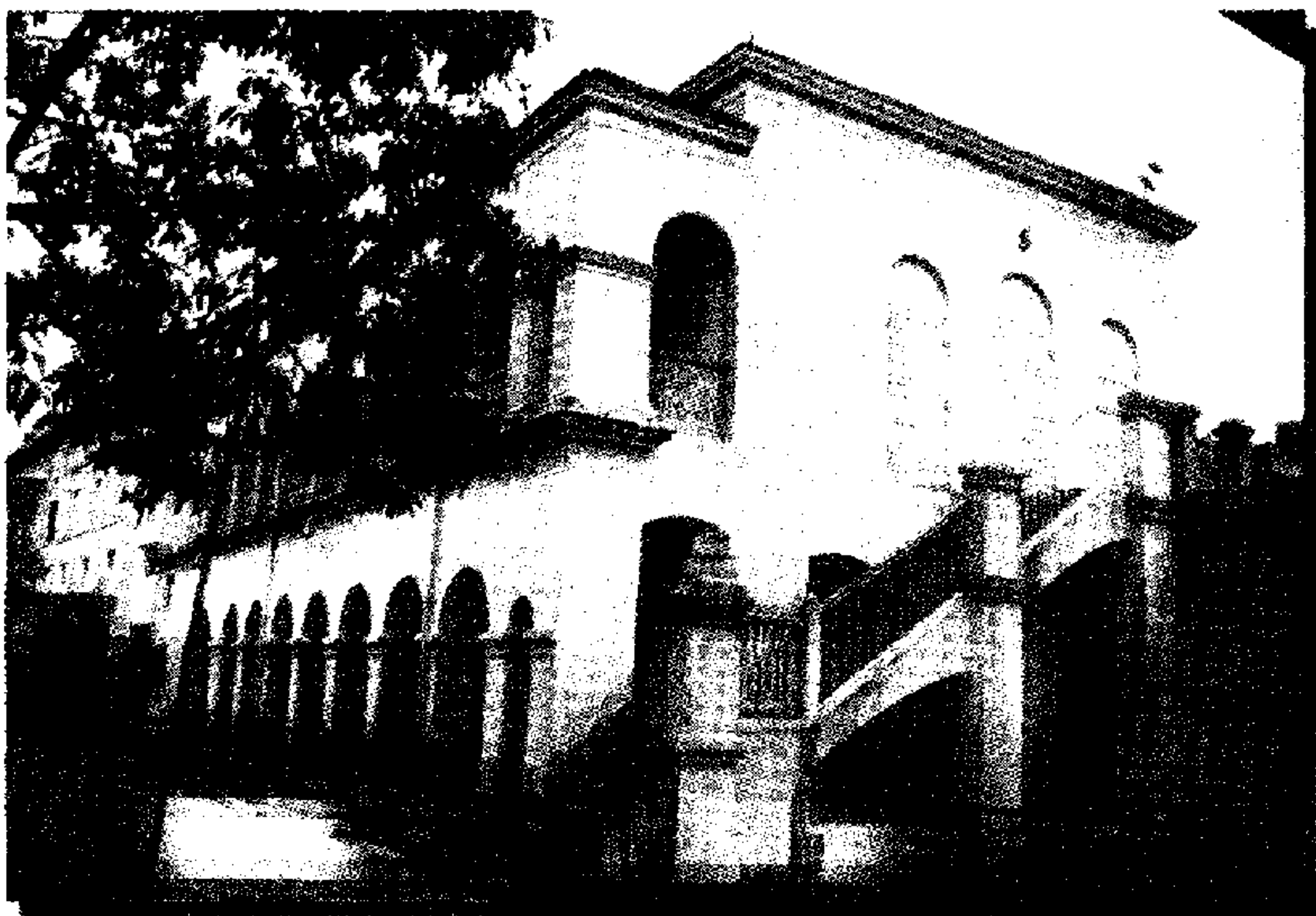
The Middle School at Malliankaranai started in 1945 has been upgraded into High School from the academic year (1997-98).

Centenary Celebrations of Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Sargachi

As a part of the centenary celebrations, the Ashrama installed on 7 September 1997 a plaque at Daudpur village of Murshidabad District of West Bengal where Swami Akhandanandaji Maharaj, a hundred years earlier, had bought an earthen jar worth two pice and fried rice of equal value for offering to a famine-afflicted Muslim girl, and also purchased fried rice for three annas for distribution among the other famine-stricken children of the locality, himself becoming penniless. To commemorate this occasion, a meeting was organized by the Ashrama and one hundred pieces of *dhuti*, 30 pieces of *saris*, 25 aluminium jars and *Muri-nurki prasad* were distributed to those present at the gathering.



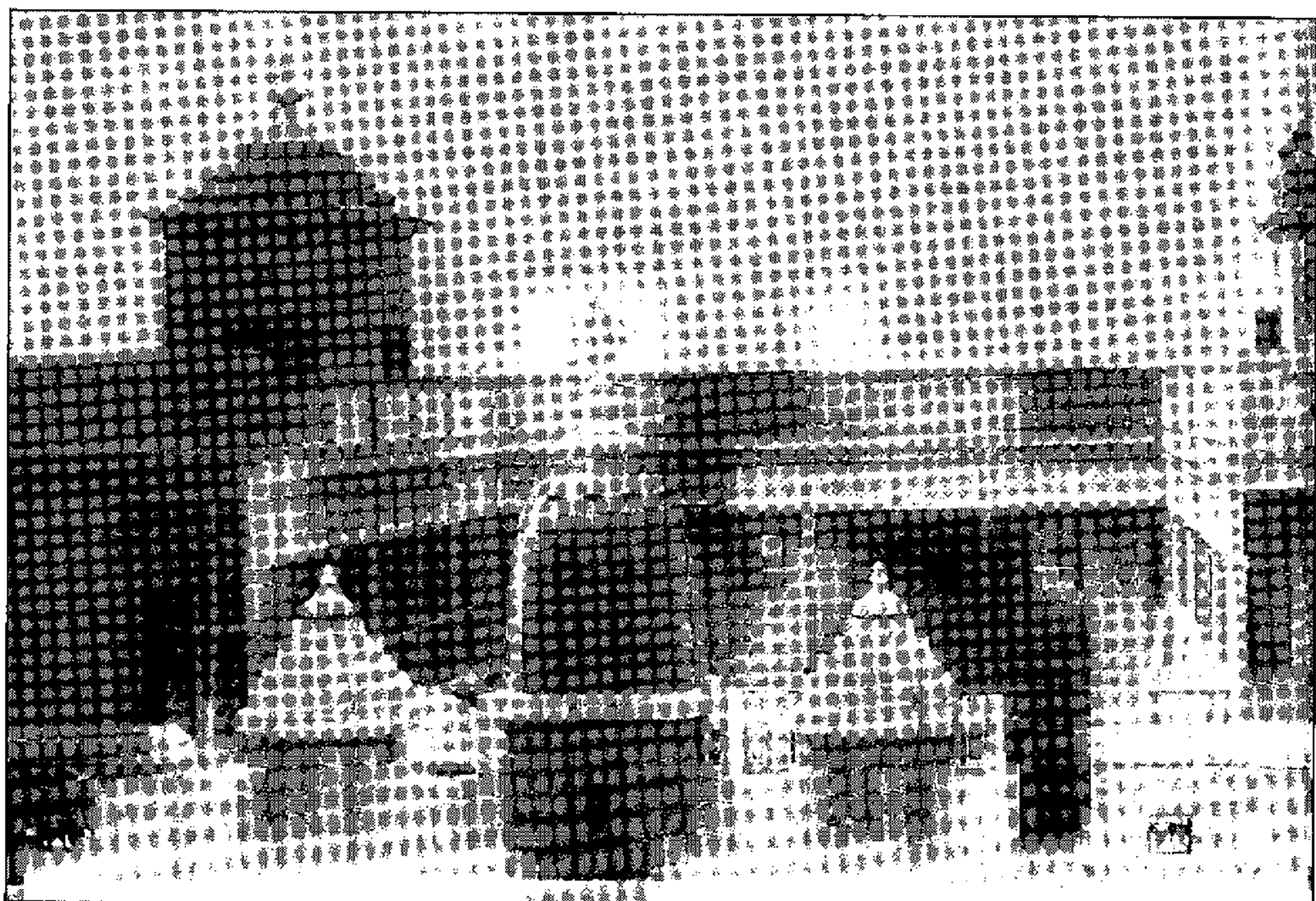
*The picture of Sri Ramakrishna
in the Old Shrine, Belur Math*



*The Old Shrine
Building*

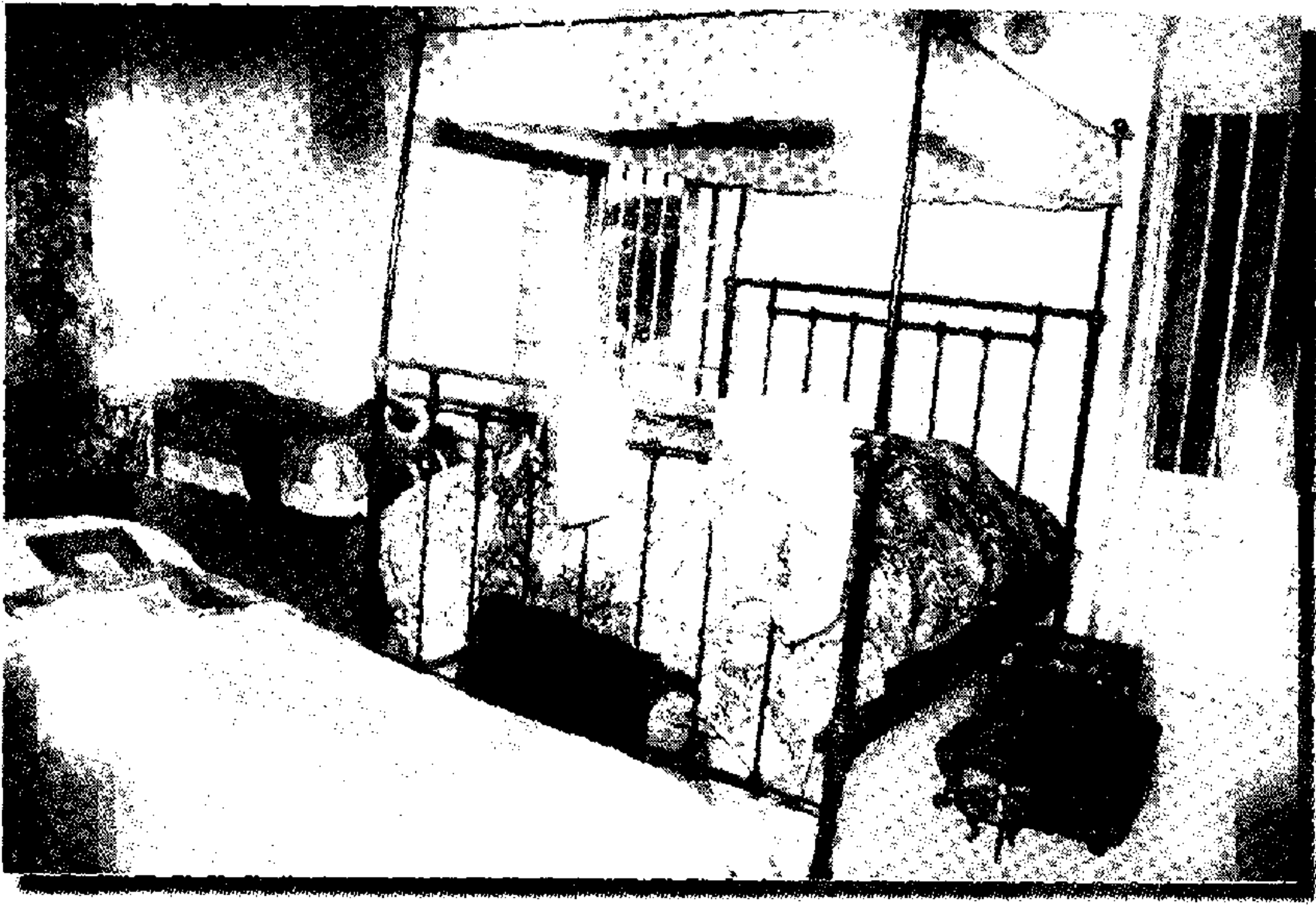


Nivedita Girls School





Nivedita with the Holy Mother



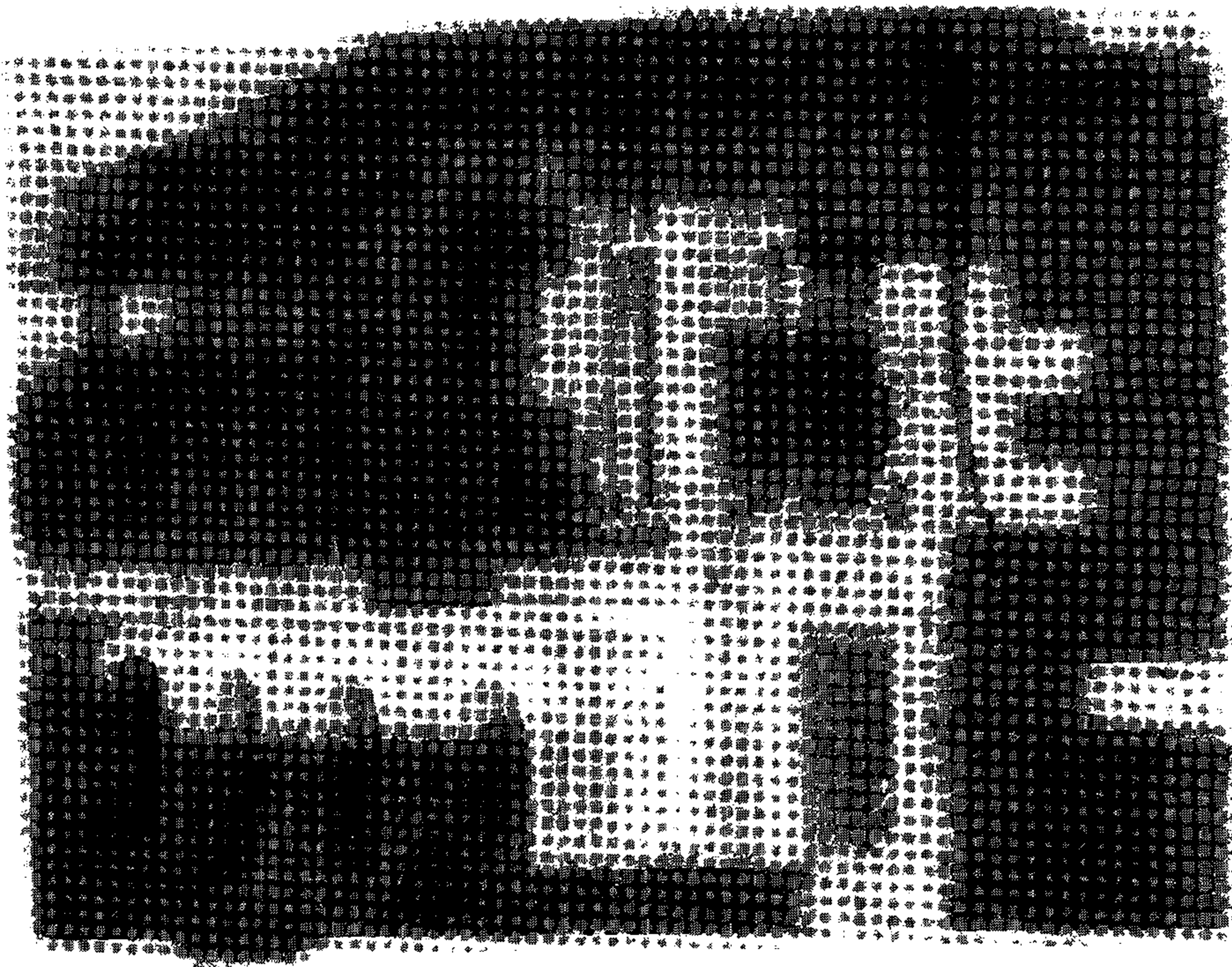
*Swami Vivekananda's room at Belur Math,
where he entered Mahasamadhi on 4 July 1902*

*Nilambar Babu's garden house where the monastery
was housed from February to December 1898*





Fig. 20: *Image of Sri Ramakrishna at the Ramakrishna Temple, Belur*
—*A Symphony in Architecture*



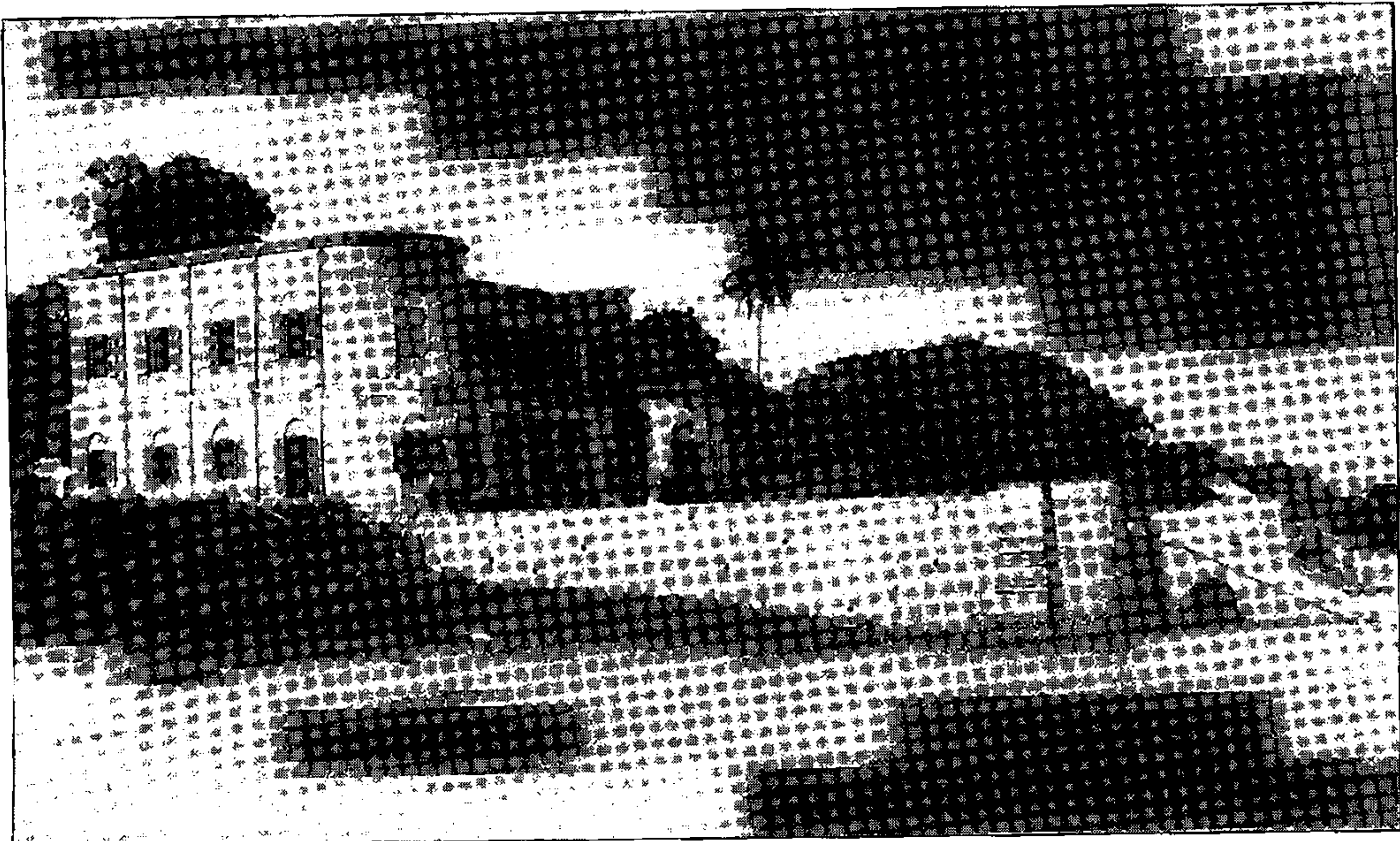
*Baranagar Math: the dilapidated building
which housed the first monastic community*



Old view of Belur Math



Eastern side of the Math Building (Belur Math)



Belur Math during Swami Vivekananda's time



Swami Vivekananda



Sri Ramakrishna



Sri Sarada Devi



Brahmananda



Premananda



Yogananda



Niranjanananda



Saradananda



Shivananda



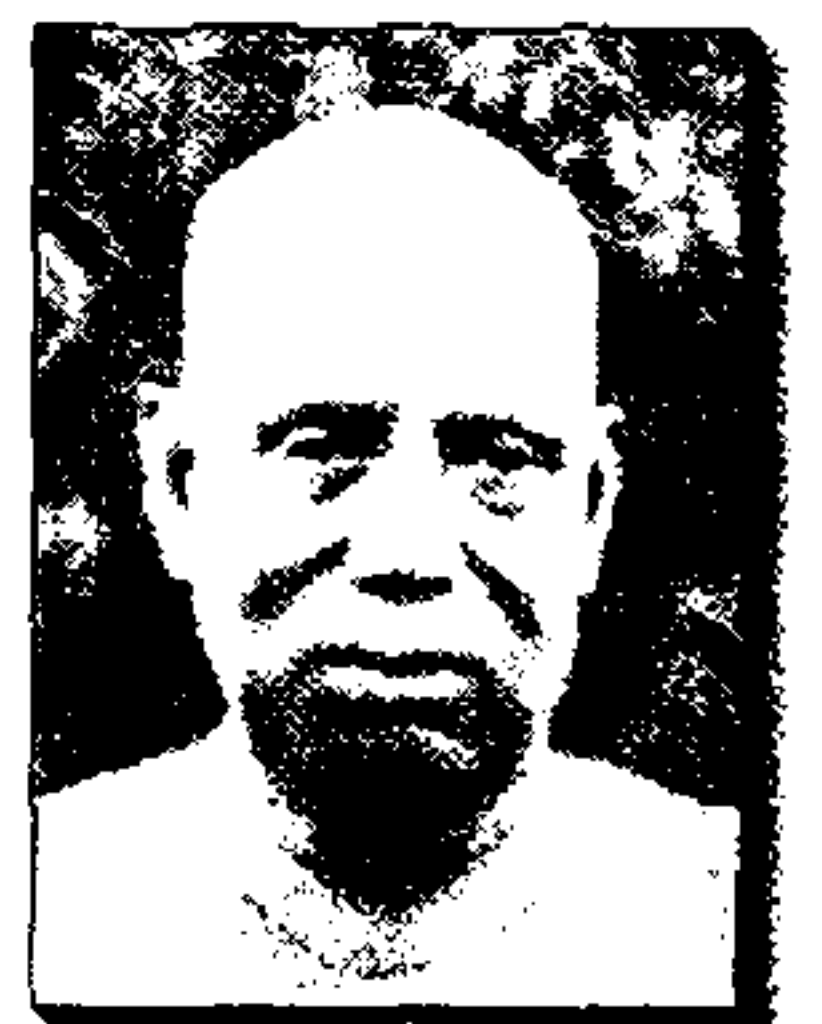
Ramakrishnananda



Abhedananda



Adbhutananda



Advaitananda



Turiyananda



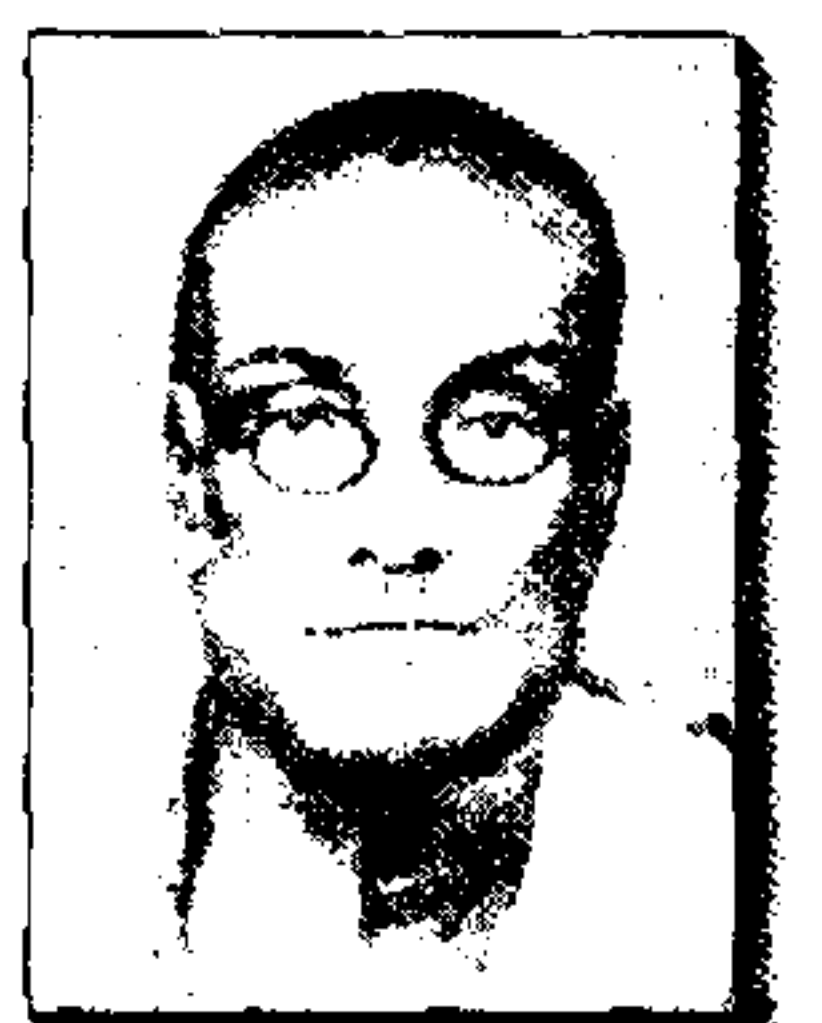
Trigunatitananda



Akhandananda



Subodhananda



Vijnanananda